Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

Submitted by

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to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Educational, Child and Community Psychology in June 2018

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Abstract

This exploratory study describes the variation in how evidence-based practice is understood in educational psychology. The study is comprised of two phases, which were both designed, analysed and interpreted using qualitative methodology. In phase one, twenty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with educational psychologists from eight services in England. A phenomenographic approach to analysis was applied, resulting in a conceptual framework, representing the variation in understandings of evidence-based practice of a group of educational psychologists. In phase two, two focus groups were conducted with a subset of participants from phase one to elucidate the influence of evidence-based practice on decision-making in practice. A framework approach to thematic analysis showed that practice decisions of educational psychologists are influenced by evidence-based practice according to contextual factors, training and practice experiences and personal characteristics.

This study gives insight as to how educational psychologists experience and account for the role of evidence and evidence-based practice in their practice and informs how evidence-based practice might be conceptualised in educational psychology. The findings suggest that evidence-based practice is grounded on personal, internalised beliefs while being contextualised by the demands of specific circumstances. The findings have implications for providers of educational psychology training in terms of the curriculum for evidence-based practice and associated learning outcomes.

Keywords: evidence-based practice, practice-based evidence, educational psychology

Acknowledgements

“The aim of intelligent inquiry is to make our fulfilments more secure and more widely shared” (Fesmire, 2014, p. 89).

I would like to thank the EPs who took part in this research project and shared with me the insights from their experience. I learnt so much from their contributions, not only about evidence-based practice but also about being an EP. For the generosity of their time, support and expertise I am truly grateful.

I would also like to thank Dr Shirley Larkin and Dr Will Shield for supervising this thesis. I have benefited greatly from their experience and I am appreciative of their assistance and feedback.

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List of Abbreviations

AEP	Association of Educational Psychologists
EBP	Evidence-based practice
EP	Educational psychologist
EPiP	Educational Psychology in Practice
EST	Empirically support treatment
BPS	British Psychological Society
GAS	Goal Attainment Scaling
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
PBE	Practice-based evidence
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
TEP	Trainee educational psychologist
TME	Target Monitoring and Evaluation

1. Introduction

This introductory chapter provides the reader with the focus of the research and its warrant in Section 1.1. In Section 1.2 the reader is provided with contextual information to situate this research. This follows with an overview of the structure of the thesis in Section 1.3. The chapter ends in Section 1.4 with an explanation of the terms used in this thesis.

1.1 Focus of the Research

“Evidence-based practice (EBP) is an approach used in numerous professions which focuses attention on evidence quality in decision making and action” (Rousseau, & Gunia, 2016, p. 667). Educational psychologists (EPs) are guided in their decision making and professional practice by a range of guidance published by regulatory bodies and professional associations. These include the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2017, 2018), the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2015) and the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) (2018). Guidelines and standards support EPs in what they are expected to do in pursuit of best practice in the five key areas of educational psychology: consultation, training, assessment, intervention and research (BPS, 2002). There is an expectation from the British Psychological Society (BPS) and a requirement from the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) that practitioner psychologists are engaging in EBP. However, neither body adheres to clear use of the term EBP.

The HCPC has recently revised its standards of proficiency (HCPC, 2015), which included changes in the introduction to explain the language used in the standards. The Council reports that through consultation with stakeholders it received a lot of different feedback about the use of the terms 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed' but with no clear consensus on which of these terms were preferred. They state that “these terms are about practitioner psychologists’ awareness and use of research and other evidence, where this is available, to guide their practice” (HCPC, 2015, p.6). They also state that the term 'evidence-based' is used in reference to specific psychological models or

frameworks and both terms have been used when they refer to the use of evidence more generally.

The BPS *Standards for the Accreditation of Educational Psychology Training in England, Northern Ireland and Wales* (2015) provides standards that are of specific relevance to doctoral training programmes in educational psychology. The standards set out what programme providers are expected to provide in their course curriculum to enhance the quality of training beyond the threshold levels set by the HCPC. There are ten sections of core competence. Listed within each section are expectations around TEPs' use of 'evidence-informed curriculum', 'evidence-informed strategies', planning of suitable 'evidence-informed interventions', and 'applications of research evidence'. In addition to the 'required core competencies', the standards for 'supervised practice' state, "It is important that supervisors and programme staff keep abreast of theoretical, research and evidence-based guidance in their fields of work, and participate in continuing professional development" (BPS, 2015, p. 30). This quote separates theoretical, research and evidence-based guidance, which implies that evidence-based means something different to theory and research. Unlike the HCPC, the BPS Standards (2015) do not provide any guidance about the use of the terms 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed'. It may be that the terms are meant in the same way as the HCPC; however, this is not specified.

The varying use of the terms 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed' in professional guidelines is interesting to note as it serves to illustrate the ambiguity of language. Certainly, the HCPC standards (2015) show how the terminology of EBP is not clearly defined or understood by the different fields of practitioner psychology. This uncertainty of terms could also mean that different educational psychology training providers endorse differing understandings of EBP and consequently, there could be different understandings of EBP by EPs.

If EPs are expected to uphold the standard that requires them to: "be able to engage in evidence-based and evidence-informed practice, evaluate practice systematically and participate in audit procedures" (HCPC, 2015, p.12), then they should have a clear idea of what this means and what is expected of them.

It is reasonable to assume that the way in which EBP is understood will have an impact on the extent that the EBP principles are incorporated in the decision-making and everyday practice of educational psychology. Lack of consensus on the definition of EBP has implications for research, policy and practice. Thus, there is a need for a better understanding of evidence-based in educational psychology to facilitate future development and meaningful implementation in the profession.

Therefore, I aim to add new knowledge to the field of educational psychology by investigating how EBP is understood and experienced by EPs. A qualitative approach provides a more nuanced understanding of EPs' conceptualisations of EBP and its influence on practice. A meaningful outcome of this research is that it could suggest areas for professional learning or further research, which could lead to EBP being more clearly defined and understood in educational psychology.

1.2 Research Context

This section outlines the contexts that influence and situate this study.

1.2.1 Personal context.

Research questions usually originate with "the researchers' personal biographies and their social contexts" (Flick, 2006, p. 106). My own experiences as a TEP have played a role in my choice of inquiry. I was influenced by the philosophy of the professional training course in Educational Psychology at the University of Exeter, which is summarised as "be the best applied psychologist that you can be". When I began the training, I was struck by this succinct statement and set about learning the craft of the profession so that I could be the best applied psychologist I could be, which has proved to be a challenging process as the nature and manner of my practice has not been prescribed.

Part of the assessment of the course is that an academic and professional tutor comes to visit the TEP on placement to observe their practice and to have a guided conversation with the fieldwork supervisor. In preparation for this visit, a

form is filled out that asks for a variety of information about the placement, including the range of activities with which the TEP has been involved. During my first year, I had implemented a friendship skills course with a group of Year 6 primary girls. I was pleased with this piece of work and was excited to include this as an activity I had done. Supplementary to providing information on work carried out is a question asking the TEP to describe how they have established the evidence base for their assessment and intervention. The first time I read this question I panicked and was not sure that I knew the 'right' answer. How had I devised my intervention? The intervention was based on an experiential learning model, and I had consulted with my supervisor and developed some materials given to me by a more experienced TEP. However, I doubted this was enough, as the question seemed to imply that research backing, more than theory, was required, and I immediately set about trying to justify what I had done by searching for research articles so that I could reference my work. This experience stayed with me and led to me thinking about what EBP in educational psychology actually was and whether what I thought it was, was the same as my colleagues.

In training to become an EP, I have been required to think deeply about my ontological and epistemological beliefs. I came to psychology later in life, during my teaching career, having trained previously in anthropology. My conception of psychology was that it is a science and so I sought to develop skills to allow me to become a scientist-practitioner. My previous research efforts in my psychology Master of Science degree and previous publication (Davies, Arnell, Birchenough, Grimmond, & Houlson, 2017) were firmly rooted in the idea of the 'scientific method' (hypotheses are derived deductively from scientific theories to be tested empirically) (Bryman, 1988). I also worked as a Board Manager for the Medical Research Council before starting the Doctorate of Educational Psychology. This role involved managing the peer review process and awarding of research grants that were critiqued and evaluated from the perspective of 'scientific potential'. In practice, however, my most successful contributions as a TEP have occurred when I have been able to use my consultation skills to achieve a solution-focused outcome. This practice experience was not in line with my preconceived notions of educational psychology as a science, and so was a "disorienting dilemma", which led to a transformed meaning perspective

(Mezirow, 1991, p.168). Mezirow (1991) states that perspective transformation is usually due to a disparate experience in conjunction with a critical reappraisal of previous assumptions and presuppositions. Due to my experiences, briefly outlined above, educational psychology practice and EBP have become subject to this process of a critical reappraisal of previous assumptions and presuppositions, and enacted through this inquiry.

1.2.2 Social context.

1.2.2.1 Political and social landscape.

The movement for EBP has pervaded many professions, not only a wide array of health and allied health care disciplines but also education and management (Trinder, 2000). Indeed, it has been said that we are in an 'evidence-based everything' era (Oakley, 2002, p. 277). Therefore, this has undoubtedly impacted on educational psychology services which are questioning established practices and moving towards increasingly accountable, evidence-based, inclusive approaches to meeting children's and families' needs (UCL, 2016).

In recent years, educational psychology services, practices and training have been altered due to changes across the UK's educational landscape (Department for Education and Employment, 2000; Department for Education [DfE], 2011; Farrell et al., 2006). The changes have been driven by neoliberal educational policy reform (see for instance Ball, 2013; Davies & Bansel, 2007), which has, in times of austerity, encouraged a climate of competition and accountability (Allen & Burgess, 2010). In this climate there has been a changing role of local authorities, academisation of schools, the development of self-improving school systems (see DfE, 2010; DfE, 2016; Greany, 2014) and the developing role of the EP within the context of traded psychological services (Lee & Woods, 2017).

1.2.2.2 Educational psychology role.

The purposes and contributions of EPs and educational psychology services have changed in this context; notably, as a result of changes to the provision of Children's Services as stipulated by the Children and Families Act 2014, which is national government policy regarding Special Educational Needs and

Disabilities (SEND) (DfE, 2015). The unique role and diverse practice of EPs in this context create the challenge of maintaining the quality of service to clients, termed “professionality”, and ethical practice as a professional (Webster & Lunt, 2002). The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Code of Practice: 0-25 Years (DfE, 2015) specifies the need for settings to know precisely where children and young people with SEND are in their learning development. The Code states that they should “ensure that the approaches used are based on the best possible evidence and are having the required impact on progress” (DfE, 2015, p. 25). Evidence is key then for EPs, who have a statutory role in providing advice or information to local authorities for children and young people who have SEND and are undergoing a statutory Education and Health Care needs assessment.

1.2.2.3 Evidence-based practice.

Social, political and economic influences have led to an emphasis on EBP, across many areas of professional practice and public services. Hammersley (2001) points to the close contemporary association between the EBP movement and the new public management, with its efforts to make the public sector transparently accountable. He argues that the application of transparent accountability to medicine, education, and other areas has been premised on the assumption that explicit information can be provided about all the factors relevant to judging the quality of professional performance in these fields (Hammersley, 2001). This premise seems to have been taken up as the recent National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) local government briefing on using evidence in practice promotes the key message that “using robust methods to identify and interpret evidence, along with clear and transparent processes, helps local authorities…provide effective and cost-effective local services” (NICE, 2014, para 6). Also, in the HCPC standard of proficiency stated in Section 1.1, regarding EBP, there is a requirement to evaluate practice systematically and participate in audit procedures” (HCPC, 2015, p.12). It would seem then that EBP has been championed as a way of achieving greater accountability and value-for-money in the context of professionalism, and this warrants further exploration.

1.3 Overview of the Structure of the Thesis

The research was carried out in two phases as per the requirements of the University of Exeter. This thesis comprises seven chapters, following a conventional social science approach, and these are outlined in this section. This thesis is written in the first person throughout as this research was conducted from my perspective. This approach is in line with my philosophical assumptions, which will be presented in Chapter 3. I am not attempting to give an impression of detachment and objectivity. In fact, quite the opposite, - I will try to situate myself as the researcher throughout the text explicitly. I believe that this will help the reader make an informed judgement of this work and what I am offering to the educational psychology research community: a socially constructed form of knowledge that has been thoroughly and ethically generated.

Chapter 2 outlines the rationale for looking at EBP from the perspective of educational psychology.

Chapter 3 states the aims, objectives and research questions for both phases of the study and justifies the methodology chosen to investigate these questions. The philosophical assumptions of the study are also provided.

Chapter 4 presents phase one of the study, in which twenty-two EPs were interviewed to find out how they thought about and experienced EBP. Phenomenography allowed me to explore their conceptions of EBP to find the qualitatively different ways in which they experience the same phenomenon.

Chapter 5 presents phase two of the study, which involved running focus groups with a subset of participants from phase one. This method enabled further exploration of the relevance of an EBP model to decision-making in practice through a framework approach.

Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings that link phase one and phase two and summarises the contributions of this research.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of the research project and a critique of its strengths and limitations. Implications for the profession are discussed along with directions for future research and a personal reflection on the research process.

1.4 Definitions of Terms Used in This Thesis

This research has been developed in the absence of a definition for EBP within educational psychology. I will not define the term evidence here, as evidence is part of the phenomenon under inquiry. However, there are terms used in phenomenography to convey aspects of the process that are used inconsistently in the literature. Therefore, I have defined the terms used in this thesis for clarification and ease of reference here. Further concepts in phenomenography are presented in Section 3.3.2

Concept: A concept expresses an abstraction formed by generalisation from particulars (Kerlinger, 1973, p.28), as in an abstract idea or mental symbol

Conception: A qualitatively distinct manner in which the subjects were found to voice the way they thought about the phenomenon (Marton and Booth 1997, p.36).

Conceptualisation: The action or process of forming a concept or idea of something. The approach assumes that every theoretical construct has a 'surplus meaning' over and above its operationalisation and measurement as a 'concept' (Jarvis, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2003).

Construct: A complex idea or concept formed from a synthesis of simpler ideas (“Construct”, 2018). This is similar to the term ‘concept’ and is often used interchangeably. EBP will be referred to as a construct as this term is closer linguistically to the (social) constructionist epistemology of which this research has been conducted in (Chapter 3).

Dimension: Some concepts have more than one aspect or facet, called dimensions.

2. Literature Review

This literature review outlines the rationale for looking at EBP from the perspective of educational psychology in practice. Section 2.1 of this chapter will briefly inform the reader of the strategies used to conduct the literature review and the key sources used.

Section 2.2 explores what is EBP and examines the definitions of EBP, seeking to provide some clarification on how this term is perceived by different professional practitioners.

In Section 2.3 the key principles of EBP are considered in the context of psychology, which leads on to a discussion of philosophical assumptions in Section 2.4. Section 2.5 explores practice-based evidence in educational psychology.

Section 2.6 considers models of practice and the links with EBP, which is followed by a consideration of the skills that EPs need to be evidence-based practitioners in Section 2.7. Then Section 2.8 considers the purpose of EBP in educational psychology.

The literature review concludes in Section 2.9 by arguing that EBP is being accepted and promoted without a clear consensus of the construct by the profession of educational psychology. This review then proposes that understanding how EPs conceptualise EBP could prove useful for future EBP development and implementation in the profession.

2.1 Literature Review Strategy and Key Sources

This literature review seeks to situate this research within existing empirical, theoretical and professional knowledge bases about EBP. I took a hermeneutic approach toward the literature review, which means that it was an iterative process beginning with a thorough reading of key texts, which facilitated the search for further relevant literature to give me a better understanding of EBP.

The process and rationale for this approach are set out by Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010) in the hermeneutic circle framework.

The entry point of the hermeneutic circle is to select initial texts for reading which hold more promise of being helpful than others (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010). To this end, I searched for articles published in the journals *Educational Psychology in Practice* (EPiP), published by the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) and *Educational and Child Psychology* published by the British Psychological Society (BPS). These journals were particularly helpful as they publish papers regarding psychological theory, research and practice that has relevance for EPs, mainly those working as professional applied psychologists in a UK context. The following key search terms were used to select research relevant to the research area: 'evidence-based practice', 'practice-based evidence', and 'evidence-informed practice'. These search terms came from the initial reading of the practice frameworks for the profession of educational psychology, referred to Section 1.1. Therefore, relevant literature was not detected in bulk as my search was refined by looking for publications in these 'core journals'. A key text was a special edition on the topic of 'Educational Psychology and Evidence', edited by Miller and Gibbs in 2002 to promote discussion about the knowledge and behaviours of EPs regarding EBP. This edition sought to answer three questions: "What meaning does 'evidence' have for EPs?", "Do EPs make use of 'evidence'?" and "Do EPs create 'evidence'?" It was concluded that these are questions that need more research to answer them.

Additional literature was then identified by using techniques associated with the hermeneutic circle (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2010), such as reference tracking and citation analysis. The literature search was facilitated by using academic online search engines including Google Scholar, EBSCO E-journals, JSTOR, PsychINFO and PsychArticles. Published governmental documentation was also referred to.

2.2 What is Evidence-Based Practice (EBP)

2.2.1 The origins of EBP

The EBP movement began in the field of medicine in the early 1990s. It was borne out of a drive to address inconsistent approaches to medical treatment and inequality in service provision relating to public health care (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes & Richardson, 1996). The origin of EBP in medicine has been defined by Appleby, Walshe and Ham as "A shift in the culture of healthcare provision away from basing decisions on opinion, past practice and precedent toward making more use of science, research and evidence to guide clinical decision making" (1995, p. 3). The development of EBP was to address a recognised gap between best evidence and practice (Dawes et al., 2005). Signified by the creation in 1999 of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) as an organisation to provide evidence-based guidance on health and social care (NICE, n.d., para 1).

The definitional challenges of EBP, presented in Section 1.1, have likely arisen because multiple disciplines (e.g., medicine, health systems, social care, management, education) have taken on this term. The term's origin in public health was to guide clinical decision-making (Brownson, Fielding & Maylahn, 2009). However, in other fields, such as education and social care, decision-making is often complex, concerning emotive issues in conditions of uncertainty and decisions are often made under both time and resource pressure (DfE, 2017).

It is easy to assume that there is a common understanding and a common international discourse on EBP, but this is not the case. Evidence-based practice is seldom defined thoroughly, and definitions can be conceptualised differently (see Nutley, Walter & Davies, 2007). There seems to be a general agreement that it has to do with the value of the critical appraisal of scientific research, as one of the sources of evidence in decision-making (see for instance, Rosenberg & Donald (1995), re clinical decision-making).

2.2.2 A definition of EBP

A general definition that came from the field of medicine was made by Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray and Richardson (1996), that evidence-based medicine is determined by the "conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence-based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research" (p. 71).

This definition built on the premise by Guyatt (1991) that the way of the future in medicine is the inclusion of 'new evidence' into clinical practice. New evidence includes "quickly tracking down publications of studies that are directly relevant to the clinical problem, critically appraising these studies, and applying the results of the best studies to the clinical problem at hand" (p. A16). Including 'new evidence' in decision-making is a move away from clinicians looking to authority (whether a textbook, an expert lecturer or a local senior physician) to resolve issues of patient management.

Sackett, Strauss, Richardson, Rosenberg and Haynes (2000) later revisited the earlier definition by Sackett et al., (1996) and described the fundamental principles and five steps of EBP, redefining EBP so as to include the patient: "...the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values" (p.147). The use of the term integration is important as in the earlier definition Sackett et al., (1996) were clear that evidence-based medicine is not led by either clinical expertise or 'external evidence' but that the two evidentiary sources should be used together:

> Without clinical expertise, practice risks becoming tyrannised by evidence, for even excellent external evidence may be inapplicable to or inappropriate for an individual patient. Without current best evidence, practice risks becoming rapidly out of date, to the detriment of patients. (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 71)

'External evidence', 'best evidence' and 'new evidence' are research evidence by implication. This synonymous use of terms has led to widespread misconceptions of what EBP is, as shall be explored in this review.

2.2.3 EBP- a process for decision making

This integration of elements from the definition of EBP (Sackett et al., 1996) was seen to be important in the Sicily Statement on Evidence-based Practice (Dawes et al., 2005). This statement represents the consensus views of eighteen allied health professions regarding the underlying processes of EBP. It was proposed that the concept of evidence-based medicine should be broadened to EBP to reflect the benefits of allied health professionals adopting a shared evidence-based approach. It was felt that the definition was insufficient to differentiate between an evidence-based process and evidence-based outcome. Clinical decision making is the endpoint of a process that includes clinical reasoning, problem-solving, and awareness of patient and healthcare context (Maudsley & Strivens, 2000). It was recognised that the clinical decision-making process is uncertain and frequently no "correct" decision exists. Dawes et al. (2005) argue that EBP can help with some of the uncertainties in this decision process by using the explicit knowledge obtainable from research information. They assert the rationale for how to transform research information into clinicians' knowledge is reiterated in the five-step model of EBP (Sackett et al., 2000) as a basis for both clinical practice and teaching EBP. The five steps are:

1. Translation of uncertainty to an answerable question
2. Systematic retrieval of the best evidence available
3. Critical appraisal of evidence for validity, clinical relevance, and applicability
4. Application of results in practice
5. Evaluation of performance

They recommend that the curriculum framework for EBP should consider the importance of all steps shown above and the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes of EBP should be incorporated into professional training and registration requirements.

Dawes et al. (2005) recognise that often practitioner training courses focus on one of the steps, most commonly critical appraisal, but argue that “a balance of skills in each of the steps is needed to take a student from question through to application. Indeed, the most difficult step (sometimes dubbed "step 0") is to get students and colleagues to recognise and admit uncertainties” (p.4). They further state that attitudes, such as comfort with managing uncertainty and

reflective learning, provide the psychological framework in which evidence is appraised and applied.

2.2.4 Transdisciplinary relevance and revised definition(s)

Since its conception, EBP has evolved in both scope and definition. There is a broad range of models and frameworks that exist for EBP across different professions, such as nursing, psychology, social work and public health that are drawn from Sackett et al.'s (2000) definition. These include reference to research findings/evidence, practitioner experience and the patients/clients. These definitional elements are put forward as a model by Satterfield et al. (2009, p.382), see Figure 1. Satterfield et al.'s (2009) model encapsulate the transdisciplinary relevance and importance of EBP for all professions. They posit that all disciplines that require evidence-based decisions require the forms of evidence that contribute to evidence-based medicine, as defined by Sackett et al. (2000), along with an external frame of context, i.e. the environment and the organisational setting.

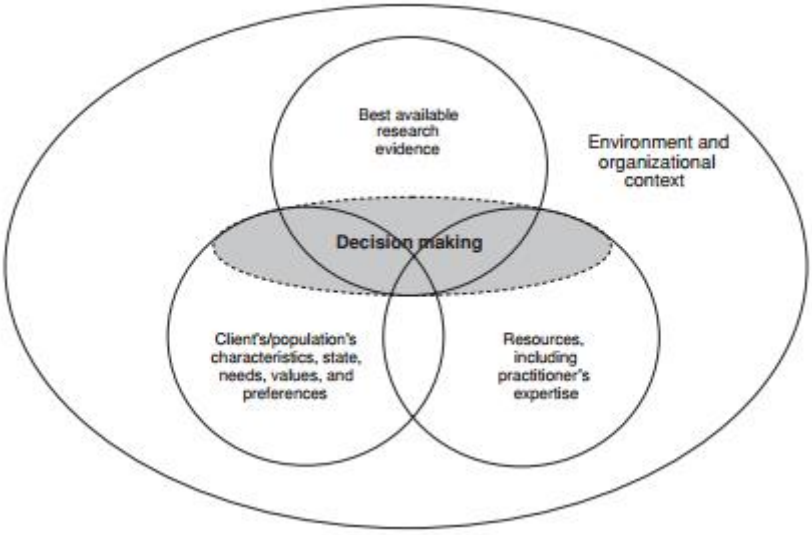

Figure 1. Satterfield et al.'s (2009) revised EBP model.

This model demonstrates that 'research evidence' is only one facet of EBP. Satterfield et al. (2009) argue that one implication of the revised EBP model is that research is needed on the relative contributions of each dimension. It is not clear how much the different spheres of the model contribute to EBP and whether there is a dominance hierarchy when contributing to decision making. Much of the literature on EBP in psychology focuses on the best available research evidence and how this is appraised and utilised in practice (see

Brown, Wickline, Ecoff & Glaser, 2009; Gotham, 2006; Pagoto et al., 2007; Upton & Upton, 2005), which suggests that there is a dominance, at least in terms of where empirical attention on EBP is focused.

Briner and Rousseau (2011a) present a definition of evidence-based management (EBMgt) that encapsulates the model provided by Satterfield et al. (2009) and could be applied to EBP more generally. They state that EBMgt is,

> making decisions through the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of four sources of information: practitioner expertise and judgement, evidence from the local context, a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence, and the perspectives of people who might be affected by the decision. (Briner & Rousseau, 2011a, p.19)

This definition reaffirms that EBP and decision making is based on four key elements as per the revised EBP model (Satterfield et al., 2009), and enhances it by highlighting the need for the best available research to be critically evaluated.

2.3 Evidence-Based Practice in Psychology (EBPP)

Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) has been defined by the American Psychological Association (APA), and it aligns with the medical definition (Sackett et al., 1996) and the model of EBP in Figure 1, proposed by Satterfield et al. (2009). They state, “Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences” (American Psychological Association, [APA], 2006, p. 273). They also state that “The purpose of EBPP is to promote effective psychological practice and enhance public health by applying empirically supported principles of psychological assessment, case formulation, therapeutic relationship, and intervention” (APA, 2006, p.273). Psychologists are therefore expected to demonstrate a clear link between their professional practice and research evidence, showing how both aspects inform their decision-making.

In 2005, the APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice (Task Force) was set up to address the specific issue of EBP. This Task Force was limited to the consideration of health services by psychologists, and although educational applications of EBPP were outside the scope of this report, they have provided principles of EBP and state that an appreciation of the value of multiple sources of scientific evidence is necessary for EBPP. The Task Force highlights the need for research on clinical expertise. Clinical expertise is the proficiency and judgment that is acquired through experience and clinical practice (Sackett et al., 1996). The Task Force echo the implication made by Satterfield et al., (2009) as they have highlighted practitioner expertise as being a significant next step in future research.

2.3.1 Assumptions of Evidence-Based Practice in Psychology (EPPP)

Research on the attitudes of psychological practitioners towards EBP has shown that there are assumptions about the nature of EBP by definition and confusion of what EBP is. Aarons (2004) and colleagues (Aarons, Cafri, Lugo & Sawitzky, 2012) developed the Evidence-Based Practice Attitude Scale (EBPAS), which assesses mental health and social service provider attitudes toward the dissemination and implementation of what they call ‘evidence-based practices’ (EBPs). Provider attitudes were found to vary according to level of education, level of experience and individual organisational contexts. However, the researchers do not define EBPs, and it becomes clear that these are attitudes towards implementing treatments and interventions based on research evidence of efficacy or effectiveness.

A resistance to EBP has also been attributed to practitioners’ limited access to empirical research and to perceived limitations around interpreting the evidence base (Brown, Wickline, Ecoff & Glaser, 2009; Copley & Allen, 2009; Gotham, 2006; Pagoto et al., 2007; Upton & Upton, 2005). However, this resistance to EBP may be inferred as the limited implementation of evidence-supported treatments as researchers and practitioners often conflate research evidence with EBP itself.

Luebbe, Radcliffe, Callands, Green and Thorn (2007) argued that many practitioners do not understand the distinction between evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) (as a process that incorporates the retrieval and examination of the scientific evidence) and empirically supported treatments (EST) (a product derived from randomised clinical trials). They published results of an online survey about EBPP taken by clinical psychology graduate students, which showed misunderstandings about the principles of EBPP were prevalent: "If EBPP is analogous to a three-legged stool balancing on these components, the current graduate student conceptualization of EBPP might be viewed as one-legged, balancing on the use of best research evidence, and in particular, EST" (Luebbe, Radcliffe, Callands, Green & Thorn 2007, p. 652). The 'three-legged stool' refers to the APA (2006) definition with the legs of the stool being the three evidentiary sources:

1. best available research
2. clinical expertise
3. context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences

Pagoto et al., (2007) also showed that there is a confusion between EBP and products of EBP, i.e. (EST), and argued that "correcting misconceptions about what EBP is (and what it is not) could have the greatest impact on facilitating implementation" (2007, p.701). Practitioners' limited understanding of EBP was also shown by Lilienfeld, Ritschel, Lynn, Cautin and Latzman (2013). They conducted a review of survey data on clinical psychologists' attitudes toward EBP and identified six sources of resistance to EBP, which included the widespread mischaracterisation of what EBP entails. These findings emphasise the importance of recognising practitioner understandings of EBP.

Research carried out by Wilson, Armoutliev, Yakunina and Werth (2009) explored the extent to which the official view of EBP reflects current psychological practice in clinical psychologists and counselling psychologists. Through interviews, they found that participants were not clear about how EBP was defined but that once a definition was provided attitudes towards EBP became more positive over the course of the interview. Participants were then able to describe its applicability to service provision. The authors concluded that

a clearer understanding of the definition of EBP might encourage exploration of EBPP by practitioners and how it might apply in their practice.

Herein lies some of the confusion in the use of the term EBP, as to take an evidence-based approach is more than just being informed by relevant research evidence (Briner & Rousseau, 2011b). It has been recognised that EBPP goes beyond published research (Levant & Hasan, 2008). The review thus far has shown that EBP is often narrowly understood by practitioner psychologists. The reasons for this widespread misconception of EBP shall now be explored.

Berke, Rozell, Hogan, Norcross and Karpiak (2011) present findings of research carried out to assess subgroups of clinical psychologists' knowledge of terms central to the implementation of EBP. In this study, EBP is referred to as "identifying, disseminating, and practising treatments that entail the thoughtful synthesis of research evidence, clinical expertise, and patient values" Berke, et al., 2011, p. 329). The terms evidence-based treatments and EST are used interchangeably with EBP. The authors argue that training influenced practitioners' knowledge of EBP. The results indicated younger, cognitive/behavioural psychologists, who were employed in academic settings knew more about EST and practice guidelines than older colleagues who practised privately in the fields of psychoanalytic/psychodynamic and humanistic/existential psychology. They ascertain that this is because explicit training in EBP is relatively recent, overwhelmingly in cognitive/behavioural treatments, and disproportionately conducted in academic settings. The findings suggest that clinical psychologists develop views about what constitutes EBP / EST, and what does not, depending upon their professional socialisation within their training programmes.

Berke et al. (2011) focused their investigation into the implementation of EBP on a single evidentiary source: research evidence. It is interesting to note that the terms that were presented as 'sophisticated research' were as follows:

- Tests of statistical significance
- Meta-analysis techniques
- Measures of effect size
- Test reliability

- Confidence intervals
- Structural equation modelling
- Multiple regression techniques
- Power of statistical tests and study designs
- Factor analysis techniques
- Odds ratios
- Measures of selectivity and specificity
- Randomized clinical trial designs

It can be seen that the authors did not include any qualitative terminology. Their findings might have been different if they had included questions about methods employed by the other fields of psychology. The authors have privileged a positivist epistemology for the implementation of EBP as per the positivist epistemology privileged in hierarchies of evidence. This could be a reason for the widespread misconception of EBP. The hierarchy of evidence stands on a notion of what is true and generalisable. Therefore, there is an assumption that EBP automatically sits in a positivist paradigm. This paradigm is not accepted by all practitioner psychologists.

2.3.2 Hierarchies of evidence

Hierarchies of evidence have been established to guide practitioners in their appraisal of different forms of research evidence, especially regarding public health. Evidence appraisal is the process of deciding whether, and to what degree, evidence supports a claim. Systematic reviews of multiple, well designed, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are usually considered as the ‘gold standard’ in terms of research evidence (Fox, 2002), see Figure 2.

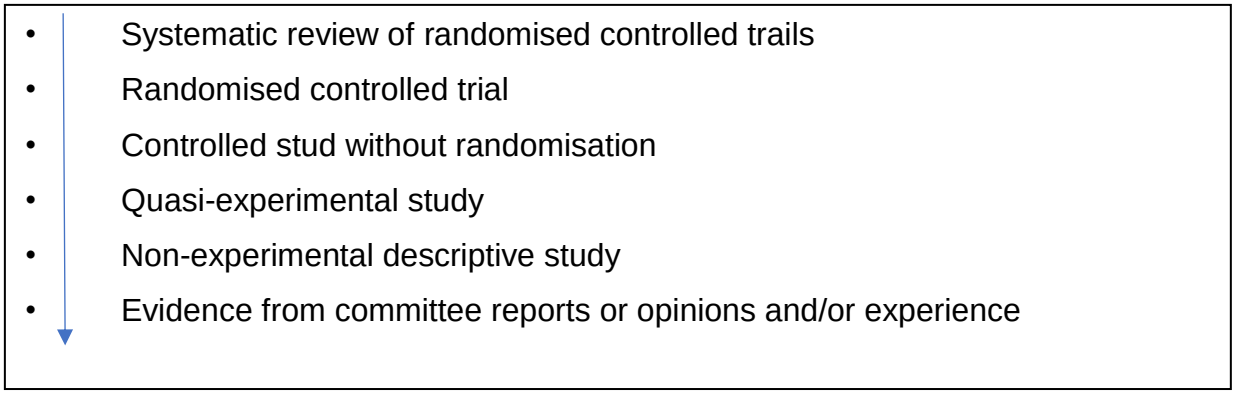

Figure 2 Hierarchy of evidence (Fox 2002).

The hierarchy of evidence is a heuristic to guide the use of different research findings in the assessment of what might work for a client in terms of intervention. The prevailing influence of hierarchies of evidence may explain the misconception of EBP as EST, with some of the assertions made by Sackett et al. (1996) being disregarded, including that "evidence-based medicine is not restricted to randomised trials and meta-analyses" (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 72). Hierarchies of evidence have been formally adopted by a wide range of governmental agencies including NICE (2014) and the Health Development Agency (Weightman et al., 2005) in the UK, which speaks to their importance. A form of evidence appraisal that is associated with policy implementation and funding mechanisms is influential and will be what many researchers strive towards.

EBP as a product is "interventions to bring about desirable outcomes for one or more clients and prevent undesirable outcomes, guided by evidence of how well they work" (Kvernbekk, 2016, p.4). Biesta (2010) acknowledges that 'what works' is relevant to professions, since they try to bring about change that is considered desirable (Biesta, 2010, p. 494). However, the notion of 'what works' has fuelled some debate about what works in what circumstances, as RCTs are said to be a source of evidence for the efficacy of, rather than the effectiveness of, psychological treatment (Roth & Fonagy, 1996). Also, claims of efficacy depend on the characteristics of the test population, the circumstances of the test and the specific ways of administering the treatment, which may not apply to other circumstances or populations, such as children in an uncontrolled

school setting (Fox, 2003). Indeed, Fox (2003, 2011) argues that this research hierarchy is not appropriate in educational psychology.

Petticrew and Roberts (2003) put forward that a matrix rather than a hierarchy of evidence might be more beneficial for assessing 'what works'. The matrix rates research differentially according to the research question being addressed, rather than just the study design, which may be more useful to practitioners. "Different research methods are, after all, more or less good at answering different kinds of research questions" (Petticrew & Roberts, 2003, p. 529).

2.4 Philosophical Assumptions

Different research questions reflect different philosophical assumptions, and Fox (2002) states that the hierarchy of evidence shown in Figure 2. "is based on a logical positivist view of reality" (p. 43). Doubts have been expressed about the appropriateness of a positivist paradigm within the context of education and the associated implications of instrumentalising practice (Kvernbekk, 2011; Simons, 2003). Indeed, Biesta (2007) associates allegiance to EBP with 'technological' practice in education, which Clegg (2005) characterises as an attack against professional knowing. Clegg raises concerns about the politics of EBP, asserting that it "serves an ideological function that is disguised through the rhetoric of independence and the idea that policy is disinterested and objectively informed" (2005, p.419).

It can be seen that positivist, empiricist discourses have tended to dominate constructions of EBP (Nieboer, Moss & Partridge 2000). The hierarchy has been developed from a medical model, which emphasises specific body parts, conditions and treatments and assumes that objective examination can reveal general laws about relations between phenomena (Alderson, 1998). Therefore, attention to evidence quality in decision making is based on the generalisability of the results. However, in other fields, such as educational psychology and social work, decisions are made based on the meanings of actions and personal perceptions of those involved, which implies a relativist position. Therefore, the aim of seeking objectivity, causation and generality are less

relevant (Norwich, 1998). “Rather, it is essential that researchers select the methods that best address the questions as they arise in real-world, human contexts” (Grieg, 2001, p.77). Indeed, a meaningful hierarchy of evidence is impossible from a relativist position, where an ultimate truth is absent (Burr, 2003). Nieboer, Moss and Partridge (2000) argue that “when we seek evidence, we may be looking for what is useful, or what is true, what is right, what is elegant, what works or what is cost effective. Each of these questions constitutes different landscapes of inquiry that are privileged in different contexts” (2000, p.17).

2.4.1 EPs’ perceptions of knowledge

Different landscapes of inquiry are explored in philosophical debates about ontology and epistemology. There is not the space within this literature review to consider the philosophical perspectives of evidence fully. However, it is important to iterate that “evidence is an epistemological concept” (Kvernbekk. 2016, p.12). Fox (2003) discusses the importance of epistemology which he asserts is “fundamental to EBP for EPs” (p. 96). He questions EPs’ perceptions of knowledge, contrasting positivism with social constructionism, and considers how these views inform professional practice. Moore (2005), like Fox (2003), argues that EPs’ practice is an expression of their epistemological and ontological positions, which should not be taken for granted and therefore highlights the ethical need to question and explore these positions and what they mean for practice.

Language and concepts are “critical epistemological factors in the creation of evidence” (Miller & Gibbs, 2002, p.5) and seem to have been the basis for considerable debate within the profession of educational psychology around the relevance of EBP. Fox (2002) rejects the philosophical assumptions which underpin hierarchical approaches and argues that the research hierarchy is not appropriate for educational psychology due to it being based on a medical model of information, which can conflict with the varying practice needs of EPs. Fox (2002) argues that EPs’ professional practice comes through reflection rather than evidence-based research.

This is in part due to the problematic nature of the evidence base in educational psychology. There is not guaranteed access to research journal articles on entry to the profession. TEPs have access to a wide range of journals and databases through their university subscriptions. However, EPs often gain access to specific professional journals through paid membership to the AEP and BPS, yet this does not include access to wider reaching scientific journals. Also, not all EPs do join the AEP and/or the BPS and therefore may have less opportunity for keeping abreast of current or privileged research.

Evidence-based practice is presented as a medical construct and as privileging positivist research methods at the top of the research hierarchy. A dominant narrative in educational psychology literature is that the research evidence that is the source of EBP is preferentially research methods that are quantitative and positivist, such as Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) towards the top of the hierarchy of evidence (Frederickson, 2002, Fox, 2002), which shows that the misconception of EBPP is also prevalent in educational psychology.

Promoting evidence-based interventions, which are analogous to evidence-based treatments, are the primary focus of the implementation of EBP in school psychology in America (see Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2003). This focus is about that psychologists have selected interventions that have sufficient research-based evidence. However, following on from the Task Force, the APA (2008) issued guidance on disseminating and implementing EBP with children and adolescents as they warranted specific developmental considerations and a broader systemic orientation due to multi-agency working. This broader orientation suggests that psychological practice with children and adolescents needs wider consideration than an empirically supported treatment, which alludes more to the process than the product of EBP. “Effectively implemented EBP requires a contextual base, collaborative foundation, and creative partnership among families, practitioners, and researchers” (APA, 2008, p.6)

2.4.2 Negotiated educational psychology practice

The creative, collaborative and contextual approach to effective EBP implementation stated above moves towards a focus on the individual within their social environment, which implies an epistemological shift for EBP applied

outside of the clinical setting to social constructionism (Kelly, 2008). Kelly (2008) articulates how this can lead to role confusion as the processes which an EP seeks to influence are "fluid, negotiable, subject to interpretation, without firm objective evidence and inevitably vulnerable to social control and power differentials" (p.23).

Power differentials are important to consider, particularly as definitions of EBP seek to guide practitioners in decision making. There is an assumption that the direction of knowledge, and therefore power, are unidirectional and that decisions are made *about* rather than *with* a client/service user/patient. Some researchers (see Adams & Drake, 2006) have argued for a process of shared decision making between the clients and the practitioner as they argue that both parties will have important information to contribute to the process. In educational psychology shared decision making has been developed in a psychological model of consultation, where the psychologist uses their psychological knowledge and interpersonal skills to empower others to come to a decision (Farrell & Woods, 2015). A consultation framework was developed by Wagner (2000) to match more closely the complexity of the social systems in which the EP is working.

Due to the 'tangled complexities' inherent in their work, Moore argues that EPs are better served by social constructionism as an epistemology of practice (Moore, 2005). "Social epistemology" ensures that there will be no expert handbook, simple formulae or sets of techniques to which it [practice] can be reduced" (p.114). This statement seems to argue against the premise of EBP. However, the intention of EBP was not to reduce practice to formulaic practice as Sackett et al. (1996) originally stressed, evidence-based medicine is not "cookbook medicine. Because it requires a bottom-up approach that integrates the best external evidence with individual clinical expertise and patient's choice" (p. 71). Like Frederickson (2002), Fox (2003) posits that resistance to EBP is overcome through a "commitment to researching our own individual practice" (p. 101) as 'practice-based evidence'.

2.5 Practice-Based Evidence (PBE) in Educational Psychology

Kratochwill, et al. (2012) recommended that traditional experimental research is complemented with information developed from practice-based evidence (PBE). In the American school context, PBE is primarily executed by practitioners working in partnership with researchers to extend the knowledge base on implementation in the natural context of practice to drive forward the EBP movement.

EPs are expected to be able to work with key partners to support the design, implementation, conduct, evaluation and dissemination of research activities and to support evidence-based research (HCPC, 2015, p.24). Frederickson (2002) argues that evaluation (of outcomes) is a "basic requirement of EBP" and "a key requirement of accountable and ethical professional practice" (p. 106). The challenge of evaluating outcomes is to "define outcomes that are measurable and demonstrate impact within an increasingly complex and multi-professional working environment" (Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai & Monsen, 2009, p.54). There have been initiatives from practitioners in developing tools to support the evaluation process, such as the Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) system (Dunsmuir et al., 2009) and Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) (Frederickson, 2002). Lowther's (2013) research showed that while evaluation tools have been used, there is a diverse range of information drawn upon as evidence to demonstrate change, which included practitioner reflections.

What PBE will look like depends on "our view of what is good quality research and ultimately, therefore, our view of knowledge" (Fox, 2003, p. 100). Differing views of knowledge raises the issue of how outputs, outcomes and evaluation can be appraised and aligned with values and beliefs. It is important to make the distinction between "output measures" (what is done) and "outcome measures" (what is achieved) (Sharp, Frederickson & Laws, 2000). It is also the case that in education outcome measures often rely on factors other than the EP involvement (Turner, Randall & Mohammed, 2010). EPs work within messy, complex, and unpredictable work environments and so the relational skills of the EP can be seen to be as important as the scientific skills. EPs are generating practice-based outcomes, and of fundamental importance is that EPs both have and exercise choice within their practice setting (Barkham &

Mellor-Clark, 2003). Fox (2011) argues that RCTs and other experimental methods do not emphasise the interactional nature of therapeutic approaches and these might be better researched through an action research approach. An action research approach ensures that EPs are given the opportunity to learn and act by experiencing and reflecting on their experiences (Fox, 2011). Fox (2011) asserts that it is important for EPs to strengthen their evidence base through PBE and thus turn their own experience into professional expertise.

PBE includes practitioner evaluation (see Frederickson, 2002; Dunsmuir et al., 2009 and Burnham, 2013). Indeed, Fox (2011) argues that individual EPs need to systematically research their professional practice through reflection and audit. Eodanable & Lauchlan (2009) suggest that "the significance of…evaluation skills for EPs cannot be undervalued in terms of their contribution to EBP." (p. 121), and argue that it is a fundamental part of both the current and developing EP role.

2.6 Artistry in Decision Making and Models of Practice

There have been arguments made for research evidence in EBP to come from a more constructivist approach (see Grieg, 2001 and Miller & Todd, 2002). Fox (2003) sees this as a way of addressing the "… problematic position of EPs espousing a constructional view of professional reasoning but then flipping to a positivist view if challenged" (p.101). Fox (2011) feels that the skills of an EP are akin to artistry and as such he seems to be focusing on the sphere of the Satterfield et al. model (2009) that pertains to practitioner expertise.

Research evidence on its own, cannot tell an EP, which intervention, method or approach to use. Deciding on a course of action requires not only examining and weighing the factual evidence, from research and perhaps from other sources as well but also identifying what the value priorities should be, as well as what is feasible and prudent. Practical judgments are required, and it is important to recognise the variety of perspectives from which psychological issues can be, and are, legitimately evaluated through models of the scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner. Certainly, to be able to draw on appropriate knowledge and skills to inform practice, the HCPC prescribes

practitioner psychologists' use of a "scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner model that incorporates a cycle of assessment, formulation, intervention and evaluation" (2015, p.22).

The scientist-practitioner model of training within applied psychology is an important concept relevant to EBP. Fundamentally, the scientist-practitioner model envisions psychologists who utilise critical, scientific thinking skills in their approach to the unique problems that confront them (Thorne, 1947, cited in Stoiber & Waas, 2002).

The reflective-practitioner model is associated with learning from experience. Schön (1983) identified ways in which professionals could become aware of their implicit knowledge, learning from their experience to become empowered to do more than follow set procedures, as early practitioners do due to a lack of 'knowing-in-action' (tacit knowledge), and almost intuitively adapt their practice.

Fox (2003) references the work of Schön (1987) in arguing that EPs "need artistry, not rationality as the basis from which to work" (Fox, 2003, p. 97). Fox (2003) argues that the evidence base for professional practice as experience and not research. Thompson (2003) echoes this sentiment in the nursing context and argues that it is necessary to equip practitioners with critical reflective skills so that they are aware of the cognitive biases that make clinical decision-making based on experiential knowledge susceptible to error. Common biases include: overconfidence, hindsight and base rate neglect (ignoring statistical information about prior probabilities of phenomena). It is concluded that practitioners' cognitive biases can be addressed through education.

In the educational psychology context, Fox (2011) summarised a number of cognitive processes, which affects one's ability to judge the truth or accuracy of information or evidence that is presented and warns of the danger in becoming emotionally attached to particular psychological frameworks. There are particular difficulties in addressing 'hot topics', and there is a natural resistance to changing deeply held beliefs. Acknowledging cognitive biases has important implications, particularly for training courses where TEPs are exposed to

particular theoretical perspectives, including EBP. Trainees have to be able to evaluate different theoretical perspectives and realise what is psychologically happening to them when they are confronted with evidence that does not fit with their chosen theoretical framework.

Gillham (1978) in his influential text, Reconstructing Educational Psychology, argued that EPs were confused about their role. This is a perennial point of discussion (see Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Ashton & Roberts, 2006 and Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010) and it would seem that EBP is an area for debate in the profession that is linked to the role of the EP. More recently, there has been an explicit move for EPs towards a reciprocal reconciliation of the pragmatic and the scientific through the conceptualisation of the role as that of a 'scientist-practitioner' (Lane & Corrie, 2006). This reconciliation envisages EPs making relevant use of scientific principles and methods, such as hypothesis testing and validity checking, within the context of their practice with individuals and groups, to extend the generalisable knowledge base of the profession (Lane & Corrie, 2006; Miller & Frederickson, 2006). This conceptualisation of the role is in line with the dominant empiricist discourse.

However, there is an alternative conceptualisation of the role. Burnham (2013) researched the epistemological and ontological positioning of seven EPs. His findings suggested an ambivalence about the scientific basis, including the contribution of peer-reviewed research, to their practice. The utility or social value of educational psychology professional practice was deemed more important than its congruence with a recognised evidence base, and decision-making was described as situation-based. Burnham (2013) highlighted the participants' perceived importance of personal attributes, values and beliefs to their role as an EP, "whose development preceded professional training rather than being acquired as a part of that training" (p.23).

The participants in Burnham's (2013) research all qualified under the previous training route of a one-year Masters programme, and none had undertaken post-qualification doctorates. It is conceivable that EPs, who have trained under the doctorate system may have different attitudes and perspectives with regards to the scientific basis of their practice. Due to the additional two years of

training, which includes the honing of research skills and the completion of an original piece of doctoral-level research, which contributes to the professional evidence base (Miller, 2007; Eodanable & Lauchlan, 2009). Indeed, Burnham's (2013) study pointed to some EPs operating within a social constructionist paradigm with little or no reference to the scientific evidence-base informing their practice.

The juxtaposition of these two role identities put forward by Burnham (2013) and Lane and Corrie (2006) serves to question how these identities fit in with an EBP model. It could be that both scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models contribute to a holistic understanding of EBP. As advocated by Dawes et al., (2005) reflective learning and managing uncertainty provide the psychological framework in which evidence is appraised and applied.

2.7 Training

Leadbetter (2002) highlights the importance that training courses play in shaping the profession by developing the skills and practices of TEPs, which include the necessary skills to be consumers and producers of research (Frederickson, 2002). The three-year doctoral training programme allows for a greater emphasis on research and evaluation skills, which are necessary skills due to the growing emphasis on accountability and EBP (Dunsmuir et al., 2009).

Cameron, Frederickson, Lunt, and Lang (2008) identify that the doctoral training has the task of developing and extending the links between theory, research and practice. They recognise that it is a challenge for applied psychologists to synthesise "highly specific, frequently piecemeal research with the urgent and often-messy demands of the real world" (p.266). Professional practice frameworks have been endorsed to address the challenge of applying theory to complex practice methodology in educational contexts (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). These are "a series of steps, stages or actions that support the application of a theoretical model or models" (p.18).

EPs are keen to promote the value of their work. However, their practice will be influenced by their worldview, and some EPs will be committed to particular ways of working, such as consultation, and others will prefer to use psychometric tests. There is nothing wrong with either of these commitments. Both tools are used in a wide range of settings to assist psychologists to understand behaviour, then to use this information to make decisions and guide future action. EPs, bound by ethical principles will need to be explicit about the limitations of the information provided by these tools and be careful in the interpretations of any findings.

2.8 Purpose of Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

Within the context of educational psychology, EBP is not a simple given to which psychologists can easily aspire by adopting a particular methodology or epistemology. Rather, it is a difficult concept in which the nature of evidence, and the perspective from which it should be assessed, is subject to negotiation (Miller & Todd, 2002). Therefore, it is important to consider what kinds of questions EPs are looking to answer, the decisions they have to make and therefore what evidence they need to evaluate. Then by "consolidating this relationship between theory, research methodology and professional practice, EPs will be able to assert a credible claim to an evidence base that is rigorous, sensitive and coherent" (Miller & Todd, 2002, p.93).

2.8.1 Trust and professionalism

Within the current political climate of neoliberal economic policies (Meegan, Kennett, Jones, & Croft, 2014) it may be that the drive for EBP in the field of educational psychology (Fox, 2003) is a drive for accountability procedures (Dunsmuir et al., 2009), as was outlined in Chapter 1. This drive calls for "greater transparency in psychological processes and decision-making, rigorous evaluation of effectiveness" (Kelly, 2008, p.17). Fox (2011) suggests that EBP had "become a politically astute way of managing scarce resources" (p. 326). Therefore there is "pressure to demonstrate effectiveness, to be accountable and to make use of appropriate evidence bases in working with clients" (Kelly et al., 2008, p. 25). Being accountable has an important relationship with trust. In the 2002 Reith Lectures, Onora O'Neill refers to a 'culture of suspicion'

characterised by a diminution in public trust. A ‘culture of suspicion’ has led to a culture of accountability, which “requires detailed conformity to procedures and protocols, detailed record keeping and provision of information in specified formats and success in reaching targets‟ (O’Neill, 2002, p. 46). The suggestion is that the introduction of performance management and targets has replaced trust in professional judgement. Therefore, the EBP movement and a more technological approach to practice can also be seen as a way of evoking a sense of trust in EPs. Particularly as objectivity in EPs’ decision-making is a perception held by the public (Fox, 2002).

The drive for accountability also implicates that EPs may soon be under pressure to demonstrate the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of the service they provide. Indeed, within a traded model of service delivery, this may be even more relevant. EPs’ practice is in danger of being valued regarding how much money they bring in, relative to their costs, and whether ‘customers’ are satisfied. In the most recent edition of EPiP, Gibbs and Papps, (2017) report the cost and perceived benefits of educational psychology services.

There is an opportunity for EPs to demonstrate their trustworthiness, contribution to education and show the skills they can offer, and decide how best it is to evaluate their work, rather than rely on legislation to dictate the direction EPs’ practice should take (Maliphant, 1997). Indeed, much of the contribution to the discussions around EBP have not been within the field of educational psychology itself. Although we can learn from these differing viewpoints, in the context of changing working practices impacting on the role of the EP and service delivery, it seems timely to explore what EBP in educational psychology means for EPs.

2.8.2 Understanding EBP

Ways of understanding EBP has been explored by Avby, Nilsen and Abrandt Dahlgren (2014) in the social work profession. Fourteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with politicians, managers and executive staff in three social welfare offices in Sweden. A phenomenographic approach to design and analysis was applied. The main findings suggest that there are qualitatively different ways in which EBP is understood, described in five

categories: (i) fragmented; (ii) discursive; (iii) instrumental; (iv) multifaceted; and (v) critical. Each category represents increased comprehensiveness in understanding of EBP. These different understandings of EBP were associated with different descriptions of social work practice and varying perceptions of quality such as an instrumental understanding being associated with rationality and EBP as primarily involving the implementation of evidence-based methods and assessments in practice. This level of understanding has been shown as a common assumption of EBP in psychology (Section 2.4.1). Avby et al. (2014) reason that EBP has not been implemented as something uniform, which explains individual interpretations ranging from narrow understandings to broader, more all-encompassing understanding of the integration of different knowledge sources. They argue that the results highlight the importance of acknowledging these differences and using them as stimuli for reflection in social work practice to promote knowledge use and learning. The implication being that a critical understanding of EBP is what is strived for.

In educational psychology, Urquhart (2012) investigated the way in which EBP is understood by group of 21 qualified EPs. Employing a mixed-method design, the range and diversity of views were initially collected through two focus groups, which were analysed and interpreted using a thematic analytic approach. The resulting themes, along with themes from the literature, formed a 'concourse' about EBP and a Q-methodological approach was used to explore further the range of understandings. Based on a shared interpretation of the results it appeared that a broad level of consensus existed regarding how EBP was understood by the group. However there did appear to be philosophical differences among practitioners that may mediate the way in which understandings of EBP manifest themselves in applied settings. Urquhart's (2012) findings show a broad level of consensus in understanding, and therefore a more nuanced understanding of the differences in how EBP is understood may serve to elucidate the construct.

2.9 Rationale for the Study

As decisions made by social workers and EPs involve the perspectives of clients in a 'messy' context, it would be plausible to assume that there may also

be differences in the ways that EPs understand EBP and make use of evidentiary sources. In the same way as social work, understanding how EPs conceptualise EBP could prove useful for future EBP development and implementation in the profession.

Particularly as it has been identified in the literature that there is a widespread misconception of the construct of EBP, with Pagoto et al., (2007) showing the importance of recognising practitioner understandings of EBP for implementing EBP. This review of the literature has also shown that research into EBP has primarily focused on the best available research as an evidentiary source in EBP, showing there is a gap in knowledge about the dimension of practitioner expertise in the model of EBP. It will then prove useful to explore if the current definition of EBP captures what is necessary for educational psychology practice, such as the intricacy of joint problem exploration and power relationships in decision-making. This study will then address a gap in the literature that currently exists about the contribution of 'clinical expertise' in evidence-based practice, and will explore specifically EP practitioner expertise in decision-making. The *HCPC Standards of Profiency* (2015) are for practitioner psychologists from a range of different settings- which may explain why when registrants were consulted, there was no clear consensus on the use of the terms 'evidence-based' and 'evidence-informed' practice. This research will help to ascertain what are EPs' opinions on EBP and if there is any consensus or variation in conceptualisations of EBP within this group of practitioner psychologists. It may also be of some value to clarify what EBP means for educational psychology practice.

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the aims and research questions for both phases of the research in Section 3.1. This is followed in Section 3.2 with the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research. The methodological approaches taken are discussed in Section 3.3, which includes an in-depth discussion of phenomenography, the method adopted in phase one of this study and an outline of a framework approach to thematic analysis, the method applied in phase two of this study. I then provide an account of how quality assurance of the research has been met in Section 3.4. Finally, I provide the ethical principles that have guided the research in Section 3.5.

3.1 Research Aim, Objectives and Questions for Both Phases of the Research

The literature review has shown that the phenomenon of EBP has gained momentum in recent years across many fields, including educational psychology (Frederickson, 2002). It also demonstrated that EBP is seldom defined thoroughly, and definitions can be conceptualised differently. The meaning of this construct seems to be linked to contrasting conceptualisations of 'evidence' with the fundamentalist realist/constructionist divide in educational psychology (Miller & Gibbs, 2002). However, EBP is generally accepted without a clear consensus of the construct by the profession of educational psychology and so points to the need for meaningful understanding and deliberate investigation of how EBP is understood in educational psychology. Therefore, the objective of this research is to explore what are EPs' perceptions and experiences of EBP and how this influences the decision making in their practice, so that EBP in educational psychology can be better understood and defined in terms of this professional practice.

The research sought to address the following research questions

1. How do EPs conceptualise EBP in Educational Psychology?
2. How are the ways in which EPs make decisions influenced by EBP?

This is, therefore, an exploratory, descriptive, and thus qualitative study, into how EPs conceptualise EBP and the influence this has on their decision making.

3.2 Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning the Research

Every researcher has their own view of what constitutes truth and knowledge (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). Research is then informed by the researcher's philosophy of knowledge, that is assumptions about ontology, epistemology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Paradigms represent a combination of these ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises that are attached to a worldview about the nature of social reality and provide a foundation for the research process (Blaikie, 2007). My ontological stance was that of pragmatism while at the same time adopting an epistemologically social constructionist stance. Adopting these epistemological and ontological positions has affected not only the way the research has been conducted but also how it has been reported, the claims made and the role of the researcher. This research has not been presented as being objective and generalizable. There has been an important role for reflexivity within the research and issues related to the quality of the research are addressed in Section 3.4.

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the nature of social reality (Ramey & Grubb, 2009) and what we can know about it: the kinds of things that exist, the conditions of their existence and the relationships between these things (Blaikie, 2007). As was shown in the literature review quantitative research has been aligned with positivism, which takes a realist ontological stance where there is a single, objective reality. This reality can be discovered by objective observation and the collection of measurable, tangible data. Whereas qualitative research has been aligned with a relativist ontology, represented by interpretivism which holds that realities are multiple, constructed and holistic. In this sense, the known and the knower influence each other; and all descriptions are time and context bound. In opposition to the dualism of these philosophical positions is pragmatism, where ontological arguments about either nature of the outside world or the world of our conceptions are just two sides of the same coin (Morgan, 2014).

The pragmatist philosophy of science espoused by Dewey (1910a) is situational (or contextual). Specifically, any human activity is perceived as a social activity and any social activity is believed to be a situated activity (Baert, 2011). The notion of reality is that it is ever-changing, and based on our actions. This means that attempts to find an enduring, external reality are doomed to failure. Dewey called the dualist attempt to find a reality outside of ourselves a 'spectator theory' of knowledge. The key to understanding Dewey is "to get away from the idea that knowledge is a picture of reality; knowledge, for Dewey, is something we use in order to live, work and act in the world" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 69). Although there is no objective reality for pragmatists, it is not considered fully subjective either (Kitcher, 2012). The pragmatic paradigm supports a nonduality, by proposing an intersubjective approach.

One the most important features of pragmatism is that it rejects the notion of knowledge as truth. Pragmatism considers knowledge to be something that comes from human interests and is related to action. Therefore it should be judged by its usefulness not truth. I would argue that educational psychology in practice enacts a pragmatist philosophy as it is a "professional activity rooted in practice. It is a scientific approach applied locally. Its findings are time and context dependent" (Ormerod, 2006, p. 908). Pragmatism in educational psychology emphasises the practical value of knowledge and taking action to make a positive difference (Burnham, 2013).

I agree with Powell (2001) who argued that "the mandate of science is not to find truth or reality, the existence of which are perpetually in dispute, but to facilitate human problem-solving" (Powell, 2001, p. 884). Pragmatist inquiry is not driven by a desire to solve the standard philosophical problems, as Dewey highlights, "we do not solve them: we get over them" (Dewey, 1916, p. 19). That said, pragmatism does offer a priori principles about scientific knowledge being situated, partial and enacted from a particular viewpoint. Pragmatists insist that scientific knowledge is an intervention in the world and that, as an intervention, it is necessarily shaped by the interests or focus of the researchers involved (Baert, 2011, p.27). As an applied psychologist this approach provides me with

a congruent and consistent approach to the application of psychology and of scientific method in both my research and my practice as an EP.

3.2.2 Epistemology

It is important to state the epistemological stance of the research as this allows for an understanding of the type of knowledge the study is aiming to obtain, as discussed in Crotty (1998). The epistemological perspective of the research is social constructionism. This is the view that how we know what we know is through meanings that are constructed. Therefore, knowledge is "constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998; p.42). This epistemological perspective is in line with the theoretical perspective of pragmatism, as both social constructionism and pragmatism view discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artefact of communal interchange (Gergen, 1985).

I am seeking to construct the meaning of EBP by exploring the differences in understanding of this phenomenon. The different experiences of individuals and the meanings that they form from these experiences will be interpreted to provide a form of constructed knowledge to describe the phenomenon of EBP in the practice of EPs.

3.2.3 Researcher role

This research views knowledge in terms of its usefulness for developing practice and therefore operates on the principles of a pragmatic approach. In this approach, knowledge is understood regarding its purpose to resolve problems and to inform action (Blaikie, 2007). In carrying out this research I am taking on the role of a "practitioner-researcher" (Robson, 2002) as I am carrying out a systematic 'real world' enquiry, which is of relevance to my job as a TEP. Robson states that one of the disadvantages of this position is of 'insider problems', in that I may have preconceptions about issues and/or solutions (Robson, 2002). I do not see this particular issue as a disadvantage, in fact I agree with Robson who also states that this position is advantageous due to having a pre-existing knowledge and experience base about the situation and

the people involved. Dewey's concept of inquiry (1910b) is a process by which beliefs that have become problematic are examined and resolved through action and this research inquiry has come to fruition due to my own experiences as a TEP learning the craft of educational psychology in practice. This is in accordance with a pragmatist line of enquiry as I am not seeking to find truth or reality, but I am seeking to solve a problem that best supports the purpose of exploring the ways in which EBP is understood by a group of EPs.

Axiological principles are incorporated in pragmatism's core assumptions about the nature of inquiry. "Pragmatism insists on treating research as a human experience that is based on the beliefs and actions of the actual researchers" (Morgan, 2014, p. 1051) and "the knower is an active participant in what is known, not an outside spectator if it or passive receptacle" (Fesmire, 2014, p. 86). It is then crucial to be cognizant of my values, attitudes, and biases and use reflexivity to demonstrate axiology.

3.3 Methodological Approaches

The research aim has informed the direction of the study in both theoretical and methodological terms. The process of this research has been informed by my philosophical assumptions as outlined above. I conducted an inquiry based on pragmatism, which requires examining not just what I have done but why I have done things the ways I have (Morgan, 2014). Methodology is where assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge, values, and theory and practice on a given topic come together (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012). My research questions called for descriptive answers. Therefore, a qualitative research design was required to understand the research problem and an inductive approach was chosen to allow an exploration of the participants' experiences, views and beliefs to meet the aims of this study and gain a better understanding of the perceptions and experiences of a phenomenon.

Qualitative methods of data analysis allow for a richer understanding of phenomena and their dynamics (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In this study, I have used two structured methodological frameworks of analysis: phenomenography in phase one and a framework approach to thematic analysis in phase two.

3.3.1 ‘The idea of phenomenography’.

Phenomenography offers a suitable approach to achieving the research aim. However, it is noted that phenomenography as a research approach is not very well known in educational psychology. Phenomenography is frequently seen as a research method, at best a methodology (Marton, 1994). This is due to the research approach initially emerging from a strongly empirical rather than a theoretical or philosophical basis (Åkerlind, 2005c) and thus is suitably pragmatic (in the sense that phenomenography is complementary to pragmatism, which is a genuinely empirical philosophy [Fesmire, 2014]).

‘The idea of phenomenography’ (Marton, 1994), came to me part way through my research journey. I had set out to carry out an exploratory study that utilised thematic analysis to garner a better understanding of EBP in the context of educational psychology. Thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is appropriate to use, given my ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, I discovered phenomenography, which was described as “a research method adapted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (Marton, 1986, p.31). This approach seemed to fit exactly with the aims of my research, and so I changed the course of my research and set out to develop a phenomenographic framework of conceptions of EBP in educational psychology. This is in line with an emergent design of qualitative research whereby “the research design must, therefore, be ‘played by ear’; it must unfold, cascade, roll, emerge” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p.203). As Willig asserts, “it is our research questions that motivate our research activity and which determine the direction of our research” (2010, p. 161). I felt that this method would provide me with the tools I needed to be able to describe and communicate the ways that EPs conceptualise EBP in educational psychology.

3.3.2 Basic concepts in phenomenography

Phenomenography originates from the work of educational researchers in Gothenburg, Sweden in the early 1970s (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012). Barnard, McCosker and Gerber (1999) describe phenomenography as a qualitative, nondualistic research approach that identifies similarities and differences in the way that phenomena in the social world are experienced and understood. A non-dualistic position assumes that the 'internal' (thinking) and the 'external' (world) are not isolated entities (Saljo, 1997). Phenomenography takes a second-order perspective in which experience remains at the descriptive level of participants' understanding (Barnard et al., 1999).

Marton (1986) calls phenomenography a research specialisation, which Svensson (1997) states has the aim of describing and comparing conceptions. Svensson (1997) puts forward the six fundamental philosophical assumptions about phenomenography. These include that knowledge is achieved through an exploration of delimitations and holistic meanings of objects as conceptualised; and is based on differentiation, abstraction, reduction, and comparison of meaning. Knowledge is said to be not true, but it can be considered to be more or less fruitful, which is in line with the pragmatic paradigm outlined in Subsection 3.2.1.

Knowledge can be produced in an interview and interviewing is the primary method for data collection in phenomenographic research (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Marton, 1986, 1996). The outcomes of phenomenography are a number of qualitatively different meanings or ways of experiencing the phenomenon, including the structural relationships linking those ways of experiencing (Åkerlind, 2005c).

3.3.2.1 Categories of description.

A key tenet of phenomenography is that while people may experience a phenomenon differently, the research methodology assumes that the ways in which people experience phenomenon differently are relatively limited (Marton, 1981). This has been confirmed in numerous empirical studies (Marton, 1996). These limited different ways of experiencing a phenomenon are created from data analysis as 'categories of description'. Categories of description represent

the different conceptions participants express about the research phenomenon; a ‘conception’ being a ‘qualitatively distinct manner in which the subjects were found to voice the way they thought’ about the phenomenon (Marton and Booth 1997, p.36). These categories of description include dimensions of variation which delineate what is being experienced within each category.

Marton (1988, p. 181, cited in Yates et al., 2012) describes the four key principles that underpin the categories of description. They are relational (the subject-object relation comprising the conception); experiential (based on the experience of participants in the study); content-oriented (focused on the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation); and qualitative (descriptive). Marton and Booth (1997, p. 152) later proposed three criteria for the quality of a set of categories of description:

1. Each category should reveal something distinct about a way of experiencing a phenomenon.
2. Each category should stand in a logical relationship with other categories.
3. The number of categories in a set is determined by the extent of variation, which is limited in number.

3.3.2.2 Dimensions of variation.

Dimensions of variation are combined to create the categories of description of the experienced phenomenon (Wakimoto & Bruce, 2014). Dimensions of variation highlight a common dimension (or theme) that is present in all categories, which mark aspects of similarity and difference between the categories and serves to differentiate and delineate the various ways of experiencing phenomenon. (Åkerlind, 2005a).

3.3.2.3 Outcome space.

Categories of descriptions are shown to be logically related to each other, and this is known as the ‘outcome space’, which describes the phenomenon. However, it is acknowledged that the outcome space is only ever a partial description of the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997). The different categories in the outcome space are usually hierarchically related to one another (Marton & Booth, 1997; Sandberg, 1997). This is a “structure of

increasing complexity, inclusivity, or specificity in the categories, according to which the quality of each one can be weighed against that of the others" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 126). The hierarchy of the outcome space is based on the category descriptions which have emerged, and the structure can be inferred from the data, or it can be a result of a theoretical analysis of the categories (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). Åkerlind, Bowden, and Green (2005) state "the hierarchy is not one based on value judgements of better and worse ways of understanding, but on evidence of some categories being inclusive of others" (p.95). In some cases, a non-linear, branching structure can emerge (Åkerlind, 2005c). These outcomes would provide a useful understanding of the various ways EPs describe their understanding of and experience of EBP.

3.3.2.4 Phenomenography or phenomenology?

As I am seeking to describe the ways in which EPs conceptualise EBP I considered the use of phenomenology and phenomenography as they are both suitable methodologies for exploring participant experience. To understand why I chose phenomenography it is pertinent to outline the similarities and difference between the two approaches, which I shall do in this subsection. Phenomenology and phenomenography both come from the same root word, phenomenon, which is a fact or situation that is observed to exist or happen. Their etymology indicates that they are both orientated to describing phenomena. However, they differ, as phenomenography denotes a research approach aiming at describing the different ways a group of people understand a phenomenon (Marton, 1981), while phenomenology aims to clarify the structure and meaning of a phenomenon, or the "essence of the phenomenon" (Giorgi, 1999). Therefore, phenomenography allows not just for commonality of experience but also variation (Åkerlind, 2005c). Barnard et al., (1999) show that there are similarities between the two research approaches, but show that phenomenographic results focus on the descriptive level of participant understanding, and research is presented in a unique empirical manner (see Table 1).

Table 1 Comparing phenomenography and phenomenology (Barnard et al., 1999).

Phenomenography	Phenomenology
The structure and meaning of a phenomenon as experienced can be found in prereflective and conceptual thought.	A division is claimed between prereflective experience and conceptual thought.
The aim is to describe variation in understanding from a perspective that views ways of experiencing phenomena as closed but not finite.	The aim is to clarify experiential foundations in the form of a singular essence.
An emphasis on collective meaning.	An emphasis on individual experience.
A second-order perspective in which experience remains at the descriptive level of participants' understanding and research is presented in a distinctive, empirical manner.	A noumenal first-order perspective that engages in the psychological reduction of experience.
Analysis leads to the identification of conceptions and outcome space.	Analysis leads to the identification of meaning units.

Larsson and Holmström (2007) set out to describe the phenomenographic approach and illustrate how this method differs from the phenomenological approach. Through their worked examples of researching the profession of anaesthesiology, it is clear that phenomenography provides a structured description of the different aspects of the profession and how they can be understood whereas phenomenology describes the pre-reflective experience of being an anesthesiologist and the essence of the profession. As I want to understand the ways in which EBP is understood and experienced this is a clear motivation for my choice of taking a phenomenographic approach to address the research question 'How do EPs conceptualise EBP in Educational Psychology?', which is presented in Chapter 4.

3.3.3 The rationale for thematic framework analysis

The research intends to explore what are EPs' perceptions and experiences of EBP and how this influences the decision making in their practice. The second research question is 'How are the ways in which EPs make decisions influenced

by EBP?' and is presented in Chapter 5. The research question in phase two explores how the phenomenon under study influences practice and seeks to enrich the findings from phase one by exploring how EBP is understood by a group of EPs relating to their practice decisions.

The data collection method was focus groups, chosen primarily for the objective of research participation, using participants from phase one. A framework approach to thematic analysis was chosen for data analysis as it offered a qualitatively underpinned method that is adapted for use with limited time frames, pre-designed samples and a priori issues (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). However, a framework approach is still concerned with describing and interpreting what is happening in a particular setting and is suitable for answering contextual questions from a constructionist perspective (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The key features of framework are that it is grounded in the original accounts of the participants, it is dynamic and open to change addition and amendment throughout the analytical process. Thematic analysis skills are deployed in a framework approach but it also allowed for a priori construction of thematic categories designed to answer the specific research question, which forms the basis of data coding (Pope, Ziebland & Mays, 2000). The a priori construction of thematic categories was the primary reason for choosing this thematic approach. As the research in phase two was deepening the understanding of phase one and I wanted to explore themes that had already been constructed with this new data set.

3.4 Quality Assurance of the Research

It is argued that the criteria traditionally used to evaluate the scientific value of quantitative research in psychology (e.g. reliability, representativeness, validity, generalisability, objectivity) are not meaningfully applicable to qualitative research (Willig, 2010). Therefore, evaluation criteria are designed to address the quality of the research rather than its validity (Willig, 2010, p. 156).
Two sets of constructivist criteria have been proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994), which are headlined by trustworthiness and authenticity, which they argue parallel positivist criteria. Creswell (2007) encourages researchers to

consider what criteria they want to use to evaluate the quality of their own study based on the research approach used, including the philosophical underpinnings of the approach taken and the standards of the wider research community.

Issues of quality and trustworthiness in phenomenography have been addressed in the literature (e.g. Collier-Reed et al., 2009; Sin, 2010). Phenomenography adopts an interpretive epistemological approach to research; however, the majority of the literature ascribes to the quality of theoretical constructs of quality drawn from post-positivist theory. For example, quality is thought to be achieved in a phenomenographic study is through maintaining “interpretative awareness” (Sandberg, 1997). This means the researcher must acknowledge her own subjectivity and seek ways of minimising bias in the data.

The goal of positivism is to uncover the truth, whereas post-positivism recognises that reality cannot be known with certainty. Thus, it is not possible to achieve objectivity perfectly, but it can be approached, by triangulating across multiple fallible perspectives and reducing bias (Creswell, 2007). This is achieved by describing rather than explaining experiences of a phenomenon, not applying the researcher’s own theories of the phenomenon, and treating everything that the interviewees express as equally important (Sandberg, 2005). The researcher should also provide the precise description of the research process and excerpts from the interview transcripts to support the analyses and designation of categories (Partridge, Edwards & Thorpe, 2010).

However, it is important to note that the methodology of phenomenography is compatible with more than one epistemological position. In line with Richardson (1999), the version of phenomenography that I have employed utilises a constructionist approach, and therefore this study should be evaluated with this epistemology in mind. The paradigmatic rules of this study require that these biases should be included rather than excluded from the study. However, the incorporation of bias should be made transparent throughout (Mantzoukas, 2005).

I have provided precise descriptions of the research process and excerpts from the transcripts in my findings as recommended by Partridge et al. (2010). However, this is because I want to enrich the findings and show the information is well-founded to meet the research aim, which is to produce a meaningful understanding and a deliberate investigation of how EBP is understood in educational psychology. Therefore, I have paid attention to writing reflexively and with representation (Creswell, 2007) throughout the research process. A field diary was used to be engaged with my role in the research and to reflect on my position and assumptions. Field notes also served to record decisions made.

From the perspective of pragmatism, it is important that inquiry is conducted openly and transparently so that others "can follow critically how the conclusions of particular inquiry have been reached" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 70). To support the transparency of my involvement and actions within the research process I have placed importance on the integration of reflection throughout. Phenomenography is not well established in my field, and therefore I have had to learn much about how to proceed with my research by reflecting on the problems I have encountered to explore and clarify my understanding, which has led to reflexivity. In contrast to reflective practice which tends to focus upon a reflection of events and actions, reflexivity refers to how the research process 'is affected, regarding outcomes and process, by one's own position as a researcher' (Fox, Martin & Green 2007, p.186).

This research inquiry reflects the personal decisions I have made about its design and conduct, and thus I have made no claims on the research being value-free or objective. However, this should not detract from the value and utility of the research. In point of fact, Symonds and Gorard, (2008) assert that objectivity in research is impossible because "personal judgement is at the heart of all decisions that we make as researchers - in our choice of research questions, samples, questions to participants and methods of analysis" (p.5). Pragmatism has primarily informed concepts of quality utilised in this study, and the characteristic idea of pragmatism is "ideas and practices should be judged in terms of their usefulness, workability and practicality" (Reason, 2003, p. 103). I would argue that usefulness is a more significant indicator of quality for this

pragmatic inquiry. The notion of usefulness applies across two dimensions: “epistemological (is the information credible, well-founded, reliable?) and normative (does this help advance our projects?)” (Wicks & Freeman, 1998, p.130).

3.5 Ethical Considerations Across Both Research Phases

Ethical approval of this study was obtained from the University of Exeter’s College of Social Sciences and International Studies (SSIS) Ethics Committee before the collection of any data. The certificate of ethical approval can be found in Appendix A. To obtain this approval the ethical considerations of the research being undertaken were clearly explained, and copies of the participant information sheet and the consent form for phase one (Appendix B) and phase two (Appendix C) were provided.

The research was designed and conducted within the ethical principles outlined in The British Psychological Society’s ‘Code of Ethics and Conduct’ (BPS, 2009), with particular reference to the principles of respect, responsibility and integrity. These principles provided guidance on issues around the researcher and participant relationship, including my responsibility as a researcher to avoid harm to the psychological well-being, health, values and dignity of the participants. In particular, this is a study that involves peers, friends and colleagues and therefore it was important to reflect on the possible consequences not only for the persons taking part in the study but also for the larger group they represent.

I followed the basic principles of ethical recruitment (see Fox, Martin and Green, 2011). All participants were informed of the research aims, and written consent was obtained before the collection of data, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from participation in the study at any time and also their right to decline to answer questions as they wished. The participants contributed to the study voluntarily, and I stressed that the results would be presented in a way that assured confidentiality.

In addition, when considering my role as the researcher I was guided by advice provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) on the issues of voluntary informed consent, the right to withdraw, and privacy. The Association states it is the responsibility of the researcher to operate within an ethic of respect (BERA, 2011, p.5). This advice is in line with the professional standards stated by the Health and Care Professions Council's *Guidance on Conduct and Ethics for Students* (HCPC, 2016) relating to promoting and protecting the interests of service users, communicating appropriately and effectively, and respecting confidentiality. My conduct embodies the standard of being honest and trustworthy in my personal and professional behaviour, and to act in an ethically committed fashion.

Qualitative research in psychology is saturated with ethical issues as the human interaction in qualitative inquiries affects researchers and participants (Brinkman & Kvale, 2008). As well as following the ethical rules and guidelines above, which address the traditional ethical concerns of: informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher. As per Brinkman and Kvale (2008) I have strived to maintain my integrity as a researcher as I am seeking to benefit the professional community to which my participants and I belong, through the pursuit of this research inquiry.

Ethical considerations pertinent to the method and procedure of each phase of this study will be discussed in the relevant chapters. Ethical guidelines related to informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher were continually addressed and reflected on throughout the research process as per the guidance from Brinkman and Kvale (2008). Some of these ethical reflections can be found in Appendix E1.

4. Phase 1

Phase one of the research sought to explore the ways in which EPs understand and EBP through a phenomenographic approach. Marton (1992) describes phenomenography as a research method designed to describe the qualitatively different ways in which a phenomenon is experienced, conceptualised, or understood, based on an analysis of accounts of experiences as they are formed in descriptions. In this research, these accounts were produced primarily through interviews conducted with twenty-two EPs.

Interviews are the usual method to gain access to people's conceptions (Sin, 2010) and thus an appropriate method to achieve my research aim. Interviews enable participants to “discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 267).

The participants, materials and procedure for conducting the research in phase one are discussed in Section 4.1, followed by the ethical considerations in Section 4.2. The process of data analysis is described in Section 4.3, which leads on to the presentation of the findings in Section 4.4. In Section 4.5, the findings are discussed to address the research question: “How do EPs conceptualise EBP in Educational Psychology?”.

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Participants.

Twenty-two EPs, from eight educational psychology services, were interviewed for phase one of this study through purposive sampling (Ritchie, Lewis, Elham, Tennant, & Rahim, 2013). This approach enabled me to target participants to increase the likelihood that of finding the different ways of understanding the researched phenomenon (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012).

The participants were self-selecting and were recruited by contacting eighteen educational psychology services, of which fifteen responded, requesting permission from the principal or senior EP to invite psychologists in their service

to participate. The educational psychology services I approached were in the south of England and were sourced from TEP colleagues based at the services or the internet. An email was sent to the key contact at each service containing key information about the study, participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix C). Once individuals had responded to the request, direct engagement was made with them to progress arrangements for participation.

Participant characteristics are provided in Table 2 as this informs the reader about the variation of the participant group, which supports the trustworthiness of the phenomenographic research (Collier-Reed, Ingerman & Berglun, 2009). The EPs were at different stages of their careers, which helps to “maximise conceptual variations in the data” (Sin, 2010, p. 313).

Table 2 Interview participant characteristics.

Interview Participant Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Educational Psychology Service	Training Provider	EP Qualification Level	Year Qualified	Years EP	Grade (Years in a senior role)	Qualifications
1	F	17	U, Y	M, D	2004	13	EP	Degree, PGCE, MSc conversion, MEd Psy, DEd Psy
2	F	8	M	M, D	2004	14	PEP (1)	OU Degree, PGCE, MEd Psy, DEd Psy
3	F	8	M	D	2012	5	EP	Degree, MSc RMP, PGCE, DEd Psy
4	M	17	L	M	2004	13	SEP (3.5)	BEd, OU degree, MEd Psy
5	F	17	Y	D	2012	5	EP	Degree, DEd Psy
6	F	17	U	D	2017	TEP Y3	TEP	Degree, PGCE, DEd Psy
7	F	9	U	M	2000	17	SEP (8)	Degree, MEd Psy
8	F	9	L	M	1990	27	PEP	Degree, MEd Psy
9	F	3	U	M	2000	17	EY EP	Degree, MEd Psy
10	M	4	U	D	2010	7	EP	Degree, DEd Psy
11	M	6	U	D	2003	14	SEP	Degree, PGCE, MEd Psy, DEd Psy
12	F	2	P	D	2015	2	EP	Degree, DEdPsy
13	F	13	T	D	2013	4	EP	Degree, PGCE, MSc RMP, DEd Psy
14	F	1	Y	D	2014	3	EP	Degree, DEd Psy
15	M	1	U	M	2000	17	EP	Degree, PGCE, MEd Psy
16	F	5	P	D	2010	7	EP	Degree, PGCE, DEd Psy
17	F	5	Y	M, D	2006	11	EP	Degree, PGCE, Masters, MEd Psy, DEd Psy
18	F	3	U	D	2014	3	EP	BEd, MSc conversion, DEd Psy
19	F	3	U	D	2014	3	EP	Degree, DEd Psy
20	F	3	S	D	2018	TEP Y2	TEP	Degree, PGCE, MSc conversion, DEd Psy
21	M	4	Y	D	2016	1	EP	Degree, MSc conversion, DEd Psy
22	F	15	V, M	M, D	2004	13	SEP	Degree, MEdPsy, DEd Psy

Key:
Educational Psychology Service: 18 services were contacted. These were listed alphabetically and then numbered.
Training Provider: 14 training providers were included in this sample of participants. These were listed alphabetically and then assigned a letter in order from Z-L.
Qualifications: DEd Psy- Doctorate in Educational Psychology, MEd Psy- Master of Educational Psychology degree, MSc- Master of Science degree, MSc RMP- Master of Science in Research Methods in Psychology, PGCE- Post Graduate Certificate in Education, OU- Open University

4.1.2 Materials.

Characteristically a phenomenographic interview is semi-structured but with only a few key questions predetermined (Collier-Reed, Ingerman & Berglund, 2009). However, my interview questions were developed before committing to a phenomenographic approach, and so there are more questions than may be typical. I intended to use in-depth interviews and devised an interview schedule to achieve a breadth of coverage across key issues and a depth of content within each (Yeo, et al., 2014). Therefore, interviews were conducted more in line with the views of Ashworth and Lucas (2000) that the (phenomenographic) "interview should be regarded as a conversational partnership in which the interviewer assists a process of reflection" (p. 303). I feel that the use of a more in-depth interview guide is appropriate given my novice status as both a researcher and as an EP who is developing skills of active listening (Egan, 2002).

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix F) consisting of open-ended questions covering topics of job role and training, previous experience, approaches to casework and the literature, professional knowledge and perspectives, and the nature of evidence. These included some questions used in Burnham's (2013) study of EPs' epistemological and ontological positioning as it was pertinent to my research and these are indicated on the schedule (Appendix F). I also asked participants to consider the definition of EBP in psychology provided by the APA (2006) provided on the participant information sheet (Appendix C).

Prior to data collection, I piloted the interview schedule and technique with a colleague, which helped ascertain whether the questions were eliciting data relevant to the research objective (Rabionet, 2011). In the de-brief session she said that it felt like a professional conversation and a good opportunity to share views. She found some of the questions were tricky to answer and required reflection. We discussed providing the questions in advance for reflection but agreed it would then become a structured interview which may lack depth in topic examination (Silverman, 2006). Also, not sending the questions in advance would limit social desirability bias (Grimm, 2010). I kept the pilot

interview data in the analysis as the methods and sample characteristics were unchanged.

4.1.3 Procedure.

The interviews were conducted in summer 2017, lasting sixty to ninety minutes, were digitally recorded and saved anonymously. The interviews predominantly took place at the EPs' workplace, although two were in coffee shops, one in the participant's home and one over the phone (all at the request of the participants). I was concerned that the location of the interview might have impacted on participants willingness to talk but the participants seemed comfortable in the environment and were open and frank in their discussions.

Each interview began by giving the participant a copy of the Information sheet, consent form (Appendix C) and an overview of the purpose of the study. They were also assured of anonymity in storage and any outputs from the data. The interview commenced as soon as the consent form had been signed except the phone interview where a scanned copy was sent after verbally giving consent on the phone.

The schedule was used as a guide to ensure topics were covered. As the interview was a 'conversational partnership' (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000), I wanted a natural conversational flow led by the participant's contributions, which meant in some interviews I jumped around the schedule, adding comments and additional questions in response to what was said by each participant. I knew several of my research participants and therefore it was difficult not to be side-tracked into discussing other areas of mutual interest. The interviews were interesting as a researcher and as a trainee as I learnt a lot about ways of working. Some participants cited that they had participated because the topic was of interest and importance to them. Therefore, I agree with Kvale (1996) that "the qualitative research interview is a construction site for knowledge. An interview is literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996: 14).

An opportunity to debrief about the process followed each interview and several participants commented that the interview was a chance for reflection and

continuous professional development and it provoked them to reflect on their practice and to think more deeply about EBP. A few participants commented they might have been better prepared if they had received the questions in advance and I informed them that this was considered in the piloting of the interview. A follow-up email was sent to thank them for their participation and to give the option to review their transcripts prior to analysis. Four participants requested a copy and no changes were asked to be made to the transcripts.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

The ethical issues of the role of the researcher using interviews as the main instrument for obtaining knowledge were considered (Kvale, 1996, p.117). In particular concerning using colleagues as research participants and how this may impact upon our relationship, which is primarily resolved by following the ethical principles outlined in Section 3.5. Considering issues of power between the researcher and the researched are usual in qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2000). As a TEP, I assumed that I could be thought of as inferior in role to my participants and that that balances the power relation. I am an inexperienced researcher and a nascent EP and so felt naïve in my questioning and privileged in listening to the answers.

Several of my research participants were known to me before the study as both friends and colleagues. Garton and Copland (2010) suggest that prior relationships influence the interaction in the interview and a strength of this is that data can be generated that might not be available to researchers who do not share similar backgrounds with their informants.

Out of twenty-two interviews, nine participants were known to me beforehand, and those whom I did not have a prior relationship with I could still be considered an ‘insider’. So “the shared worlds of the participants can be invoked and made relevant by either interviewer or interviewee and used as a resource to co-construct the interview” (Garton and Copland, 2010, p.547). As discussed in the ethical considerations across both phases of the study in Section 3.5 I believe this position as an ‘insider’ is advantageous and enables the “on-going

construction of shared knowledge and experiences" (Garton and Copland, 2010, p.547) as well as a more conversational style of interaction.

However, a limitation of shared knowledge and experiences is the impact of previous relationships on the phenomenographic procedure, where bracketing the potential influence of any professional, as well as personal beliefs and assumptions, are encouraged to ensure focus on the conceptions expressed by participants (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Richardson, 1999). This was difficult to achieve and is discussed in Appendix E2.

Another ethical consideration of interviewing colleagues is in the analysis and presentation of data where it is extremely important to protect the identity of the individual and the service for whom they work. Therefore, all published excerpts from the interview transcripts have been made anonymous and do not contain any identifiable information. Some interviews were transcribed by All Typed Up, a professional transcription service, approved by the University of Exeter. This service follows procedures and policies in place to ensure security and confidentiality of data, with data files being permanently destroyed within seven working days of project completion. The data files were encrypted and assigned an ID number.

4.3 Phenomenographic Analysis

Phenomenographic analysis is an iterative process, but it can be said to consist of two overall stages. The first stage involves identifying and describing participants' experiences or understandings in terms of their meaning, while the second stage seeks to identify the structural aspects of those meanings (e.g. Åkerlind, 2005b; Marton & Pong, 2005). The structural aspects are considered to be "*what"* the participant's attention is focused on and "*how"* he/she describes the phenomenon (Larsson & Holmström, 2007, p.56). To identify the structural aspects, constant comparisons between the data and the developing categories of description must be made, as well as between the categories themselves to create 'dimensions of variation' (Åkerlind, 2005b). These iterations lead to the production of a structured set of categories of descriptions in an outcome space. An outcome space provides "categories of description that portray a

collective conception of a phenomenon" (Andretta, 2007, p.156). In the outcome space, the categories are presented in a "logically inclusive structure" within which it is possible to place these different ways of experiencing (Åkerlind 2005b, p.322). Phenomenographers can describe these different categories of description through working with relatively small sample size, twenty or fewer are typical (Tight, 2016). However, the purposive selection of individuals should allow for finding the different ways of understanding the researched phenomenon (Yates, Partridge & Bruce, 2012).

The literature provides some guidelines and examples on how to carry out data analysis in phenomenography (e.g. Åkerlind, 2005a; Bowden, 2000; Marton & Booth, 1997). I chose to follow the methods set out by Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991) as this method has been used in other phenomenographic studies, including Larsson and Holmström's (2007), which was influential in my research design.

The approach for phenomenographic data analysis described by Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991) uses seven distinct steps to arrive at categories of description and an outcome space which describes the qualitatively different ways of perceiving the phenomenon. The process includes: (1) familiarisation with the text of the interviews; (2) condensation of the statements most significantly representing the emerging concepts; (3) comparison of significant statements to determine differences or agreement; (4) grouping of similar statements into tentative categories; (5) articulation of the essence of the similarity within each category; (6) these groups or categories are appropriately labelled; and (7) the categories are contrasted with respect to similarities and differences. The use of the seven steps is presented below and samples of data from all stages of my analysis are shown in Appendix F.

1. **Familiarisation with the text of the interviews.**

After the interviews, I wrote on the interview schedule my unmediated associations and reactions, which allowed me to form a subjective view of the interview and were revisited following transcription (Appendix F1). The interviews were digitally recorded, saved anonymously and transcribed semi-verbatim. Place names were anonymised, and participants were given a unique

identifier. Once I had transcripts for all the interviews I began the data analysis, which is advocated by Bowden (2005). I listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts to check for accuracy of transcription and to familiarise myself with the data. Listening to the interview again also enabled me to recall the original context of the interview. I made final minor adjustments to the text where anything was missed or misrepresented.

I read each transcript several times to familiarise myself with the content and to gain a feeling for the whole data set. The transcripts were read again as a whole for the initial identification of the participants' ways of experiencing or understanding the phenomenon in general terms. Each transcript was annotated with themes emerging from reading the text and with reference to interview schedule notes and my field notes (Appendix F2). A preliminary response to the data as in what I thought was the predominant way the participant related to EBP was written on Post-it notes and tabulated (Appendix F3). This would go on to help me develop my categories in stage four.

2. **Condensation of the statements most significantly representing the emerging concepts.**

Initially, Nvivo was used to handle and analyse the data. However, I found it difficult to engage with the material so I decided to use a manual method to do the segmenting and coding and create the categories, by retrieving and collating data into Word documents. This is discussed briefly in appendix E. Data was copied relating to a question or a theme and pasted into one document to pool them together for analysis, e.g. 'approach to casework', 'ranking evidence', 'what does EBP mean to you'. As I used an in-depth interview schedule there was too much data to analyse as a single researcher on the project timescale, therefore there were elements of the transcript I chose to discount from analysis. These were questions 1-13 in the interview schedule (Appendix D): the initial questions about the job role, and the question on the impact of traded services. I deemed the question about traded services not directly relevant to the research question and the initial questions were more about creating a rapport and talking about something more straightforward to start the interview. I then printed out the document and studied it carefully to make sense of its meaning within the context of EBP. The document was

annotated with emerging concepts. At the forefront of my mind was identifying ‘what’ participants were talking about and ‘how’ talked about it. Once the whole document had been coded. I grouped the codes to identify what the participants’ attention is focused on and how it was being understood and who it was for (Appendix F4).

My analysis of the interview data featured aspects of the phenomenographic approach described in the literature. This approach includes maintaining an open mind during analyses, minimising any predetermined views or too rapid foreclosures on views about the nature of the categories of description, and keeping the focus on the transcripts and the emerging categories of description as a set (Åkerlind, 2005b).

3. **Comparison of significant statements to determine differences or agreement.**

Dimensions of variation were developed based on similarities and differences on how the participant was describing EBP. The initial dimensions I identified from the text were: *Schema* / *Influences* / *Rationale* / *Evidence* / *Mediated by* / *Practiced as* / *Purpose.* By focusing on the similarities and the differences in the expressed meanings, cases of variation or agreement are identified and grouped accordingly (Appendix F5 &F6).

4. **Grouping of similar statements into tentative categories**

Comparing statements led to the development of different dimensions of variation based on the grouping the different conceptions expressed in the data (Figure 3), which came quite quickly, as if intuitively after many iterations of rereading the data pools of meaning. The aim is to distinguish one way of seeing a phenomenon in comparison with another, more complex one (Åkerlind, 2005a; Marton & Booth, 1997), revealing an increasing breadth of the awareness of different aspects of the phenomenon. Throughout this phase, with constant references to the data, the initial dimension of variations were further elaborated, amalgamated, fixed and defined and developed into categories of description. Gradually, by comparing and contrasting a set of descriptive categories for collective meanings is developed, defined and named in new Word documents. I initially had five categories of description, but categories

were combined and worked on to eliminate any overlap between them. (Appendix F7). This was assisted by referring back to my preliminary responses on the transcript of each participant and then labelling them with a category number to represent each participant's predominant conception of EBP (Appendix F3).

Motivation	Affirmation	Applicability	As a message	Not limited to experimenter practitioners
View of knowledge	Psychology explicit	Implicit	Community of practice	Worldview- contextualised
Professional skill / selecting	Analysis	Rapport	Application Recognition	Criticality
Importance	Minimise risk Best chance of success	Draw in different perspectives	PBE	Emancipatory
Application	Consistency	Relational	Monitor	Contextual- wicked problems
Interpretation information	Know	Feel	Evaluate	Dialectic / critique
Accountability	Competency- Record of accountability	Integrity- Initiative- Child centred outcomes	Transparency- Impact- outcome measures	Trustworthy- Honesty- Duty - Policy outcomes
System	Work for system	Work in system	Work with system	Critical of system
EBP as practiced	*Grounded-* *Research & expertise & context*	*Informed-* *Research & expertise & context & perspectives*	*Reflexive-* *Evidence requires action*	*Critical-* *Evidence is what you choose it to be- postmodern*
EBP as a tool	Guidelines Permission Valid	Unpick Dialogue	PDR Provide reassurance Defend	Awareness Political Compromise Moral Address incongruence Know answer should be giving

Figure 3 Developing categories from dimensions of variation.

5. Articulation of the essence of the similarity within each category.

The rigour of the descriptions was then tested by actively seeking inconsistencies between the descriptions and the participants' responses. Also, alternative interpretations of responses were considered, as a form of crosschecking (Dall'Alba, 1998) and statements were moved into different categories. This allowed me to identify the different conceptions that a participant expressed (Subsection 4.4.5) Categories continued to be reviewed until no further adjustments were necessary.

6. Label the categories.

To each category, a metaphor was assigned to convey a more intuitive understanding of the content of the category, as per the findings set out by Larsson, Holmström and Rosenqvist (2003). The labelling of the categories actually occurred in stage four. I was struggling to make sense of what the categories could mean and the label allowed me to make better sense of the data, eliminating any overlap between categories.

7. Contrast the categories with respect to similarities and differences

The final phase of the analysis focuses on ensuring that the categories of description meet the aforementioned quality criteria set out by Marton and Booth (1997) in *3.3.2.1*. Themes that run through and across the data were identified and used to structure the logical relationships both within and between the categories (Åkerlind, 2005a). The iterative process outlined above resulted in three versions of the categories of description, and a summary of the version development is outlined in Appendix F7. The product of the analysis is presented in the findings in the following Section, 4.4.

4.3.1 Reflection on the analytical process

Data analysis was a lengthy, iterative process carried out over five months. Where repeated readings fostered greater familiarisation with the data. During the process of re-reading, common themes and conceptions emerged in the data, albeit slowly. Making sense of the themes was difficult and I used memos I wrote to record how the categories of description developed, which included the problems I had making sense of the data and the ways I had coded it. To resolve these issues, I referred to the data and compared the coding and conceptions, to refine the themes that were being applied and developed. I also refined themes in discussion with my supervisors. Throughout, I carried out a cyclical process of critical reflection and challenged my own emerging interpretations (Willig, 2010). This was essential to ensure that the themes were appropriate and grounded in the data. (Appendix E4).

4.4 Findings

The findings have been generated using phenomenographic analysis and are presented as a tabular representation of the outcome space in Subsection 4.4.1.

Themes were identified by analysing the similarities and differences between how EBP was talked about in the analysis of the interviews, four ways of conceptualising EBP were generated, which are the categories of description. These categories are based on different conceptions of EBP, delineated by four

dimensions of variation, which are the common themes experienced in different ways. These themes represent variation in perceptions of the rationale for EBP, the use of knowledge in EBP, how trust is achieved and the application of evidence. Each category of description expresses a qualitatively different way that EBP could be understood. The categories are presented at a collective level as they are often based on ways of understanding expressed in more than one interview (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). For each category, I assigned a metaphor as a label to convey a more intuitive understanding of the content of the category, as per the presentation of findings in the phenomenographic study by Larsson, Holmström and Rosenqvist (2003). The metaphors I chose were representative of a function assumed by the EP in a particular situation: the roles of 'detective', 'bricoleur', 'manager' and 'critical theorist'.

The four categories of description were:

A) *Detective*: EBP as *what works* to justify and understand the basis.
B) *Bricoleur:* EBP as *what works* to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods.
C) *Manager*: EBP as *what works* being demonstrable, evaluated and shared in the community
D) *Critical Theorist*: EBP as *what works* being chosen based on values and power for the task of emancipation.

It is important to stress that there is no value judgement made as to any category being better than another. The metaphors assigned to each descriptive category only relate to the understanding and interpretation of EBP and they should not be understood as a typology of EPs. The metaphors are not a reflection of any EP's overall practice; it is merely to reflect the conceptualisation of EBP presented as a descriptive category. The focus of the inquiry was not on differences between individual EPs, and the categories of description are not a label to be applied to a particular participant. The individual EP may have more than one way of conceiving (and enacting) EBP and this conceptualisation may vary over time, depending on contextual changes. This is shown in the table of conceptions in Subsection 4.4.3. The variation in conceptualisations of EBP is presented in the form of an outcome space, which may contribute to an understanding of the phenomenon of EBP.

4.4.1 The outcome space.

The outcome space is “all categories of description of a phenomenon put together in an organised manner” (Larsson, Holmström & Rosenqvist, 2003, p.792). The outcome space and the relationships between the categories of description within it provide an account of the different ways individuals experience the phenomenon being explored. The outcome space presented in Table 3 shows the different ways of thinking about EBP by a group of EPs.

A tabular format is used to convey the relationship between dimensions of variation and the categories of description. For example, knowledge use in EBP was one theme that varied across the four identified categories (see Table 3). Also, presenting the results as a table provides a holistic view of the participants’ conceptualisations, illustrating the variation within the whole (Kettunen & Tynjälä, 2018). The tabular format provides a direct visual outline of systemic differences across the categories of description, which seems to represent a situational approach to conceptualising EBP.

Table 3 The outcome space of the ways (a group of) EPs conceptualise EBP.

Categories of Description			**Dimensions of Variation in EBP** (“How” the phenomenon is being experienced/described)			
		“What” is the focus	**Rationale**	**Knowledge use**	**Trust**	**Application of evidence**
(A) Detective	What works to justify and understand the basis	Professional responsibilities	Validity	Explicit	Competency	Consistency
(B) Bricoleur	What works- to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods	Child and solution focused	Applicability	Integrated	Initiative	Relational
(C) Manager	What works- being demonstrable, evaluated and shared in the community	Provide service, uphold professional reputation	Credibility	Community of practice	Transparency	Monitor
(D) Critical Theorist	What works- being a choice based on values and power for the task of emancipation	Moral obligation	Authenticity	Contextualised	Integrity	Interpret

4.4.2 Descriptive categories and dimensions of variation.

Within the categories of descriptions described above: ‘Detective’ (category A), ‘Bricoleur’ (category B), ‘Manager’ (category C), to ‘Critical Theorist’ (category D); four dimensions of variation were identified: Rationale, Knowledge use,

Trust, and, Application of Evidence. These dimensions depict specific foci, within each of the categories of description, which contribute to the meaning of how the category is inferred to be understood from the data. The descriptive categories and dimensions of variation are described in Subsections 4.4.2.1 – 4.4.2.4, and are illustrated by excerpts from the interviews attributed to a participant by their participant number, grade and years as an EP, as shown in Table 2 (Subsection 4.1.1). These excerpts have been edited to remove repetition of words and utterances to present clearly what the participant said. Ellipses indicate words omitted in the interest of brevity and relevance. Words in parenthesis either explain omitted words or are more generic terms used to protect anonymity. Words emboldened serve to highlight salient points made by the participant.

4.4.2.1 Category of description (A) Detective.

Participants with the conception of EBP as a 'detective' reported experiences and understandings of EBP that can be categorised as being what works to justify and understand the basis of psychological work to meet professional responsibilities. An understanding of the psychological basis comes from their knowledge about psychology, gleaned from research evidence and practice experience, including the practice of colleagues.

> *It's about **the strength of that research** and what the evidence base is within that, and then I think it's also about practice and the longer you've practiced, the more experience you've had of what works and what doesn't' work. So, there's that **evidence base that you build up for yourself and through colleagues and other EPs, knowing what works and what doesn't work**. (5, EP5)*

An evidence-base is built up by practice but is grounded in research. The EPs' perception of EBP is that the research provides a solid base for their work *"to make sure that it's got **a sound kind of grounding** for what we do rather than just plucking things out of the air and trying things" (12, EP2).*

The EP as a 'detective' works in the system and is accountable and aware of their professional responsibilities. Responsibilities are seen as solely attributable to the individual EP which is linked to autonomy in their practice.

> *My EBP then is based on healthcare professions council and being true to my own psychology, and my own moral compass. And in thirteen, fourteen years I haven't deviated off my map,* ***because I personally don't think you can afford to****. Especially in my early career having had experiences of three tribunals, it certainly made me realise that in that process* ***you are on your own and you have to be accountable as a psychologist****. (1, EP13)*

This highlights the perception of EBP serving a protective function and the EP as a 'detective' looks to evidence and guidelines for permission to use an approach or make a recommendation.

> *You get a grasp of, you know, needing to base any kind of judgement on something. Can't just, kind of, have an idea and think, 'that sounds like a good idea.' You know,* ***you've got to have some evidence for that****. (2, PEP14)*

The EP as a 'detective' prefers to be grounded in empirically supported psychological principles and data so that they are secure in their own understanding of what they are doing.

> *I've become a licenced trainer, and that package is very much based on evidence, randomised controlled trials, there's a very strong psychological basis behind it, so therefore I'm, happy's not the right word, but* ***I understand the philosophy behind it, I agree with it, and therefore I promote it.*** *Where there is a lack of evidence for something, I'm much more cautious about whether I recommend it or not. (11, SEP14)*

Research serves the function of affirming action and providing more confidence in a way forward.

> *I find it helpful when I come up with something that I can't answer in my own head, and I want* ***affirmation****, and you know, I do* ***default to the research*** *(1, EP13)*

In this way of conceptualising EBP, the focus is on the EP's use of concrete evidence and skills of analytical thinking, with explicit reference to psychology research, to problem solve.

> *And then I can **triangulate that with what I've seen and what I've heard**, what I've been told, what I think, and **this is the research to back it up**. (1, EP13)*

Using analytical skills is much like the investigative nature of the detective. This is comparable to the scientist-practitioner model, which envisions psychologists who utilise critical, scientific thinking skills. The key aspects of how this category of description was differentiated from the other categories were achieved by generating from the data the dimensions of variation: Rationale, Knowledge Use, Trust, Application of Evidence. These are shown in Table 4 with illustrative excerpts from the data.

Table 4 Detective - Dimensions of Variation.

	***(A)* Detective**	
"What" is the focus	*Professional responsibilities* What works to justify and understand the basis	
	Dimensions of Variation *"How" the phenomenon is being experienced/described*	
Rationale *Validity*	EBP to ensure practice is logically sound to minimise risk and provide the best chance of success.	*If we didn't have evidence-based research... We couldn't be as effective as we could possibly be. **I want to make sure that when I suggest an approach, or when I help to interpret a difficulty, I'm doing it right**. (13, EP4)* *I'd be really cross if I went to my doctor or something, and he just said 'oh, try this' and there would no evidence that it works or not, and he would have just suggested that just because he thought, 'oh well, you know it might work'. I'd be really cross. I've got to have the best chance of getting better, and **these children have got to have the best chance of, you know, making progress, achieving whatever outcome it is that you're looking for.** (14, EP3)*
Knowledge Use *Explicit*	EBP as knowledge that is stated clearly and in	*I would probably say from the rigour of having done Masters, doctorate and, seeing that actually **if you can't actually put facts of evidence down there on the table, then what are we actually drawing from?** So to me, it makes **logical sense***

	detail with reference to something concrete.	*that… So obviously I work with colleagues who've got a lot of rigour about their practice too, and so realising over the years that yeah, actually this is how we got things to show actually on the table.* ***This is what people are saying. This is what facts or statistics say****… (17, EP11)*
Trust *Competency*	EBP as a record of accountability and showing ability to do a job properly.	*I think EBP is about the* ***accountability of what you've used****, why you've used it, why you've used it for that particular client, why that time, why then, and then what leads you to your recommendations. And I think that's really important that we do have that accountability. A lot of what I do I default back to the healthcare professions council in terms of their standards. Their standards … should* ***keep every EP grounded*** *in terms of what we do, why we do it, and why we would have that dialogue, why would we have that consultation, why would we look to that assessment tool.* ***There is a standard that links to every choice we make****. (1, EP13)*
Application of Evidence *Consistency*	Grounded in research & experience	*Why is it needed? Well,* ***to give some consistency.*** *I'm struggling to put it into words. I mean, if everybody was just making it up as they went along, it could be very risky, couldn't it? (7, SEP17)* *So, using interventions and programmes* ***that have a research base****, I guess it's tending to, to use approaches which are* ***tried and tested****, bit more than just something that someone's written and hasn't got much of a* ***reputation****. It means that it's more likely to have an effect and there is* ***actually some weight behind it, that this has worked for other situations and worked in the past****. (9, EP17)*

In category (A) Detective, the rationale for EBP is to ensure that practice has validity. Practice needs to be logically sound to minimise risk and to provide the best chance of success for the child or young person. Knowledge use in EBP is made explicit. In that knowledge is stated clearly, and in detail, with reference to something concrete. Trust is achieved through demonstrating competency.

Evidence-based practice is thought to be a record of accountability and showing the ability to do the job properly. It is important that there is consistency in the application of evidence. Evidence-based practice is grounded in research and experience. These dimensions bring into focus that EBP is linked to professional responsibilities.

4.4.2.2 Category of Description (B) Bricoleur.

The EPs thinking about EBP as a 'bricoleur' reported experiences and understandings of EBP that can be categorised as being what works to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods to be child and solution focused. The metaphor bricoleur was applied in the sense of the term meaning that what was implied by the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, "someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman" (1966, p. 11). This can be clarified as retaining theoretical and practical materials on the principle that 'they may always come in handy' and are used to provide bespoke solutions in naturally-occurring contexts.

> *Well, I **try and pull from bits and pieces** and then think, 'well, what's this look like in this real family or real school?' So, looking at, well, where does- **what has worked a lot**. So, it would be a good thing to suggest. But also then just **trying to think of outside the box sometimes**. (3, EP5)*

In this way of understanding EBP, Evidence is taken from research, experience and context and is considered along with the perspectives of those involved.

> *There's very few things that you can go, 'okay, you need X, therefore Y when it comes to health and wellbeing side of medicine', you know?... So, I think it is really useful for evidence-based, to go, 'what's out there?' But **there's an awful lot missing in what's out there**. And people are messy… **just cos it works for this population with this person doing it,** that doesn't mean it's gonna work for this population with these people doing it. (3, EP5)*

The EP as a 'bricoleur' feels connected in the system and is child and solution focused. The EP maintains rapport and helps to unpick what is going on by

working collaboratively to generate a solution. Psychology is implicit in the work of the EP and it may be explicitly presented as evidence depending on what makes the greater gain.

> *I think my **most successful work is when people understand** and they get it, and **they do things differently or better for their child without feeling like someone's come in and lectured at them** and it's the same as my approach to assessment. If I've done a really good assessment, a child doesn't really know I've done it, they, I mean they might remember playing with some lady that was in the sandpit this morning or whatever we're doing, but it shouldn't show, it shouldn't leave a big print other than people having **a better understanding and feeling empowered**. (9, EP17)*

In this way of conceptualising EBP, focus is on the relational aspects of EBP and in finding a solution, using what is available there and then. The key aspects of how this category of description was differentiated from the other categories were achieved by generating from the data the dimensions of variation: Rationale, Knowledge Use, Trust, Application of Evidence. These are shown in Table 5 with illustrative excerpts from the data.

Table 5 Bricoleur - Dimensions of Variation.

***(B)* Bricoleur**		
"What" is the focus	*Child and solution focused* What works- to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods	
Dimensions of Variation *"How" the phenomenon is being experienced/described*		
Rationale *Applicability*	EBP is relevant and appropriate to the context as determined through	*And I sat there, and I was absolutely convinced that this'll work. They did it for two weeks, and they came back going, 'he's sleeping really well.' I saw them again a couple of weeks later and it's back to the beginning. They'd stopped doing it…, and it's **all the evidence in the world is not useful then**. Even direct evidence. Because there was too many family dynamics*

	dialogue, drawing on different perspectives to unpick the subject of investigation.	*and **too much else that needed to be explored with them to address that issue**. (3, EP5)*
Knowledge Use *Integrated*	EBP as knowledge that is tacit. Implicit and explicit.	*I think sometimes, in the job, **you can feel like you're making it up** but actually, I've talked to other people and they say that as well but you know that you're not making it up but it's come from deep within. So, it's **stuff that you've learnt over the years, stuff that you've read that you're able to then talk about and sort of churn out**. (5, EP5)* *I **suppose it's just trusting that you've got that knowledge and you can kind of move forward with it,** but then again that doesn't necessarily allow for the updating of it, but **at least you've got an evidence base grounding**, if that makes sense? (12, EP2)*
Trust *Initiative*	EBP as providing a new way of dealing with a problem to achieve child centred outcomes	*So that simple recommendations, if you present it in terms of, **this is what best evidence says, it's more likely to be accepted and implemented** by schools, which is, at the end of the day, is **what we want of our research, if our involvement is going to be at all helpful.** We just don't want, "Oh that was a waste of time, involving the EP". We want to change practice; we want to make things better, **we want to add something that's going to be useful**. (4, SEP13)*
Application of Evidence *Relational*	Informed by research & expertise & context & perspectives	*Yes, you can learn all these techniques and strategies, but actually, the **relationship is the thing that makes the biggest difference anyway**. That's what **research shows**. (7, SEP17)*

In category (B) Bricoleur the rationale for an EP thinking about EBP like a bricoleur is ensuring that practice is applicable, the knowledge use is integrated, trust is achieved through demonstration of initiative in problem-solving and it is

important that the application of evidence is relational. These dimensions bring into focus that EBP is linked to child and solution-focused outcomes.

4.4.2.3 Category of Description (C) Manager.

The EPs thinking about EBP as a manager reported experiences and understandings of EBP that can be categorised as what works being demonstrable, evaluated and shared in the community to provide a service and uphold professional reputation. The EP works for the system and has a community perspective at the forefront of their application of psychology.

> *I think we need to be **continuously learning what works and why**. So, informing, **making sure the profession is there to kind of bring that perspective** and I do think it's very much needed, that we've got a kind of **set of principles**, I guess, that help us agree what do we think is, how do we know when something is working. (21, EP1)*

> ***We produced a report on their perspectives on what the provision was perceived to be for and what the experience was and what the outcomes were**. Clearly that was a **qualitative bit of research, related directly to that service for a particular purpose, but I feel it was still evidence based,** even though you couldn't necessarily say a day unit in another local authority would operate in the same way or would have the same evidence and I think some of our work in schools, you could describe similarly so, it might be **that we put in place a particular series of actions with a member of staff that we're working with and we monitor the outcomes**, with either an individual child or a group of children and I think that is evidence based practice within that school context. (8, PEP27)*

The EP seeks to make an impact and provide assurance of the value of their work.

> *I think there **should be some kind of measure**. I'm not necessarily thinking those need to be statistically analysed, you know? … but you can also do questionnaires, you know, just questions, asking staff and parents and children, did they think it was effective, how has it been effective. (2, PEP14)*

> *I mean it's very easy to accept the phrase EBP or practice-based evidence, those phrases, without actually thinking what is behind them. But* ***without having EBP then I think we're just very open as a profession to a lot of criticism*** *about what we do and- and how we operate and how we work. And so, therefore, it needs to, it's very important. (17, EP11)*

Evidence is taken from research, expertise and context and is considered along with the perspectives of those involved and requires accountable action. It was recognised in this conception of EBP that there are different ways of thinking about what is good evidence.

> *So, EBP is practice that's based on available, you know,- good evidence, really. I mean, I suppose there are* ***different ways of thinking about what's good evidence*** *and whether anybody's got time to trawl through, you know, the range of evidence that's there and, you know, the sort of, what they call, gold standard of evidence versus, you know,* ***reasonable research projects that's kind of shown to be effective*** *and – but not, randomised control trial-type evidence. Again, I think EPs are really in a really good position to be* ***doing practice-based evidence****. (2, PEP14)*

Principles of plan, do, review provide an evaluation of what works, and discussion with colleagues contributes to reflexive practice. The opportunity for discussion with colleagues helps to form the approach of the EP.

> *So yes, the* ***discussions around the research articles that was quite important and helped to clarify my thinking and my creation if you like, of training packages or approaches.*** *But then after that it is* ***the practice on the ground****.* ***It's trying out the ideas and seeing the effect of them****. And as I say there's a* ***bit of confirmation bias there*** *but I'd be very happy when they work. (15, EP17)*

In this way of conceptualising EBP, focus is on practice-based evidence and linking in with the bigger picture by communicating to a wider audience.

> *There's a greater awareness now that* ***money will be spent on things that are NICE recommended****… so when we are mindful of the suggestions that we're making or areas of research,* ***it's about where is this coming from? How does it link in with the bigger picture?*** *(11, SEP14)*

The key aspects of how this category of description was differentiated from the other categories were achieved by generating the dimensions of variation: Rationale, Knowledge Use, Trust, Application of evidence, from the data. These are shown in Table 6 with illustrative excerpts from the data.

Table 6 Manager - Dimensions of Variation.

(C) **Manager**		
"What" is the focus		*Provide service, uphold professional reputation* What works-being demonstrable, evaluated and shared in the community
Dimensions of Variation *"How" the phenomenon is being experienced/described*		
Rationale *Credibility*	EBP to provide reassurance and defend actions to engender trust.	*You've got to be in a position where,* ***if anybody questions it, it can be justified,*** *and if people are comfortable about justifying their opinion, I would say that's the most important thing, and* ***they can use EBP to do that.*** *(4, SEP13)* *It means* ***how we gather the evidence****. How we measure what we're doing as we go along. How* ***we've got some rigour within that****, even though sometimes I will admit that can be a little bit loose. But, so making sure that we actually have accounts written up of what we do. (17, EP11)*
Knowledge Use *Community of practice*	EBP to create, share and steward knowledge.	*I think the EPs are increasingly needing to, having to, making aware more of the enhancing of public health. There's been* ***a much greater link over with clinical psychology and that awareness of the public health model,*** *Future in Minds funding etc… I think what's important with EPs is that we* ***do link in with public health models and enhance the understanding of NICE guidance and being aware of where***

		***the Government is going**. In a lot of documentation, EPs are very much an afterthought, they're not particularly mentioned, yet we are a big profession, it's relatively small but within the grand scheme of things I think it's quite a big psychology profession. We can make a massive difference but I think we also **would be very naïve not to be aware of where Government policy's going, where health policy's going, where money is spent.** (11, SEP14)* *I think it also, in having an evidence base, it can capture all of that research that is going on and **it's then shared, isn't it?** It's **not something that's just sat on and we can't access**, at least we can, you know, at some, somehow it can be shared and we're guided by it, I suppose. (12, EP2)* *So it's **having evaluation**, it's having as we go along with that. Within projects it's looking at how actually we- we write those up and we use them, so that we've got a **bank of local knowledge, which again can be used strategically** within local authorities to say well, we've done X, Y, Z pieces of work, this is what we found. Therefore, this has got a **local sort of evidence base**. (17, EP11)*
Trust *Transparency*	EBP as showing actions as scrupulous to bear scrutiny.	*When you've got ten pounds to spend, and you can only spend it once, you **need to some have basis on how it's spent**. (11, SEP14)* *I think again, being very clear that as a psychologist my role is to, or our roles are to use psychological knowledge that- to me, that has to come from somewhere. It has to be; **it's a science, so it has to be, we have to know it works**. Particularly in terms of psychological theory, that- **we need to know that comes from somewhere if we're then sharing that and promoting that**. I think it…as I said I think it's fine to do things that aren't evidence based, but to know that they're not and to, or to **know what the level of evidence basedness** is. (15, EP17)*
Application	Reflexive as	*And I think we do always have to go back to this as, as a guiding*

of Evidence *Monitor*	evidence requires action	*principle but I **don't think it should limit our work as hypothesis testing**, experimenter, practitioners. So long as we can, **we can make a link and we can monitor what we're doing.** Maybe I'm going out on a limb now but I'm, I would say that, that it would need to be monitored carefully and we wouldn't**, it's really important not to waste people's time by going down courses of action that are not going to do any, make any difference.** (8, PEP27)* *I think that the practical experience that we use in schools in order to **generate actions, which in turn generate their own evidence, has to be rooted in core research-based evidence** at a broader level. (8, PEP27)*

In category (C) Manager, the rationale for EBP is that it achieves credibility for the profession. Evidence-based practice provides reassurance and defends the actions of an EP, which engenders trust. Knowledge use in EBP is seen as important to create, share and steward knowledge to create a community of practice. Trust is achieved by being transparent. Evidence-based practice shows actions as being scrupulous to bear scrutiny. It is important that the application of evidence is monitored. Evidence-based practice is reflexive as evidence requires action. These dimensions bring into focus that EBP is linked to providing a service and upholding the reputation of the profession.

4.4.2.4 Category of Description (D) Critical Theorist.

The EPs thinking about EBP as a critical theorist reported experiences and understandings of EBP that can be categorised as what works being chosen based on values and power for the task of emancipation to fulfil a moral obligation. This category was based on the notion that critical theory involves both identifying and challenging assumptions with a focus on emancipation.

Evidence-based practice is questioned in terms of its purpose and its utility in their practice. For some EPs there was a notion of scepticism about what EBP could offer, above and beyond what the EP can gain from taking an interactionist perspective of what is happening for a child.

> *I think to get, I don't know, philosophical about it I suppose, I'm* ***always wary of references and being too strongly guided by something that isn't present, or isn't the situation I'm dealing with right at that moment.*** *So…I could be working with an autistic person, and I could say the evidence for working with autism is that you do X, Y and Z. And I think I can bring that into that person and I totally see that has a purpose and I do that as part of my practice.* ***But I think being too much in that line that I then see that actual child through the lens of the literature.*** *Do you see what I mean? (21, EP1)*

This highlights the importance and value placed on seeing the child as an individual.

Evidence-based practice is seen to be part of a societal agenda, and the role of the EP is questioned regarding supporting or refuting the politics of EBP.

> ***I think it's very easy to like again subliminally take on the societal agenda****. Like I don't know, this education system's pretty flawed in lots of ways. Why should I support it to…part of me feels like why should I support it children to do better in a system which is really un-nurturing. Where I see teachers on a daily basis crying because of the stress they're under. Things like that…* ***Maybe we do need to be more like challenging of what we're doing. And like, and more honest. More honest about like how we are just fitting into a governmental, societal structure****. 21, EP1)*

The EP as a 'critical theorist' is situated in the system that they critique and take a worldview perspective. The EP is aware of the powerful choices they make in selecting evidence or the lens through which to view the child.

> *It just depends who you're asking, doesn't it? So* ***it's very easy to present "evidence" that is accepted by those who receive it as valid****, which is meaningless. And so for instance one of my beefs with the TME was that it was being used to- it was being summarised into a single, you know, like seventy-seven percent of* ***people think that's positive and it's completely meaningless because there's no criterion reference or norm reference*** *benchmarks. So to start of find*

> *means or to summarise is completely, well I'd say* ***unethical let alone meaningless****. (10, EP7)*

The EP uses skills of criticality and often operates on a moral imperative.

> ***Emancipatory, ethical wanting to check in that change is owned and benefited. That the benefit is felt by the person on whose behalf you're working.*** *(10, EP7)*

The EP use compromise informed by dialectic to ease the felt tensions of incongruence of expectations and values. Evidence shouldn't be accepted at face value as there are usually counter arguments or evidence that is not applicable to all. The research evidence needs to be balanced by professional expertise and consideration of all the factors.

> *I think there* ***should be a dialectic*** *and I would say, educational research, there should be a dialectic and whereas, I would accept there is* ***empirical research that is supportive****, talk about literacy, I would say, that the Dunfermline literacy experiment did* ***show good evidence for a synthetic phonics approach to literacy****, but, I mean, at the same time, I think* ***it's reductionist*** *and, you know it works for a lot of kids* ***but it doesn't work for all kids****… I don't think it should ignore other research in a field where* ***sort of what's happened and sort of depowered teachers as professionals,*** *as sort of the A, B, C of, of, of teaching or, or, the* ***join the dots method****, you know? (4, SEP13)*

The dialectic is provoked and informed and by values and can lead to choices being made based on these values for the task of emancipation.

> *We were presented with a certain way of evidencing the impact of our work in a way which I wasn't very comfortable with... Which then I lay sadly awake that night thinking, oh why aren't I comfortable with that? … And so* ***that was about wanting to be more psychological about not having sort of output based measurements, which were kind of easily measurable behaviour change. About wanting to give the child a voice and an ownership in that. About wanting to measure a change in beliefs and attitudes rather than just a change of behaviour****- and those sorts of things which we have to become more*

> *aware. So it was about trying to do all those things we've talked,* ***so trying to balance those dilemmas to give the child a voice and ownership****. (10, EP7)*

The EP may be political and seek to affect wider change such as policy outcomes.

> *I think the* ***EP role is quite fluid*** *and I think there's sort of a* ***whole debate around can EPs shape policy and practice****. Often I think we're not mentioned in policy documents; you see clinical psychologists mentioned. I think* ***EPs often don't…aren't mentioned as much or given as much recognition as they should.*** *… And I think we need to* ***have much more of a voice in that****. (20, TEP)*

The key aspects of how this category of description was differentiated from the other categories were achieved by generating the dimensions of variation: Rationale, Knowledge Use, Trust, Application of evidence from the data. These are shown in Table 7 with illustrative excerpts from the data.

Table 7 Critical Theorist - Dimensions of Variation.

(D) **Critical Theorist**		
"What" is the focus		*Moral obligation* What works- being a choice based on values and power for the task of emancipation
Dimensions of Variation *"How" the phenomenon is being experienced/described*		
Rationale *Authenticity*	EBP as an emancipatory tool used in accordance with own values and beliefs.	*I think probably as I said before. The fact that we're working with people, and it's* ***the responsibility we have to make things better for people*** *makes it important because it's people's lives and it's that kind of keeping in mind that* ***this isn't just a case it's somebody's life that we're trying to help****- we're trying to help and change, help them to change (19, EP3)* *I think the fact that well,* ***we are a social science****. The fact that we know from our studies, Masters, doctorate, whatever, what*

		that actually can look like. ***Gathering evidence, understanding what the importance of looking behind what we actually do. Ethics, thinking about aspects of evidence****. So I'd like to think that* ***they're all drivers in my head****, sometimes consciously, sometimes not. And I think because of who I've become I think they're- that's all-* ***all drivers of that and the opportunities I've had****. (17, EP11)*
Knowledge Use *Contextualised*	EBP as knowledge put into a meaningful context that is appropriate for the desired outcome	*My own experience really, because it's what we're doing the whole time, it's* ***basing our advice not on a body of learnt dictums, this is what you should do in certain situations.*** *It's not like a body of laws or rules, or a way of approaching something. (15, EP17)* *Knowledge or assumptions? My knowledge of it is th****at it's really important that we should be doing it,*** *but that* ***often the constraints whether that's kind of those are financial, systemic, what model you kind of work within****. Perhaps curtail or limits your ability to kind of use the best interventions, buy them in. (20, TEP)*
Trust *Integrity*	EBP as based on values to ensure trustworthiness.	*You know, the evidence I think itself* ***should be on plan do review basis****, which is another reason why I like the self-organised learning, because it says we'll start off with a set of values around why. You know, w****hy do, what do we value, what…are we measuring what we value. And do we value what we measure already. Are our strategies actually in line with those values? Have we thought about things like…power and you know emancipatory thinking and ethical thinking,*** *and- and learnt evidence, and research led. And theory and formal and so on. And then is what we're getting out actually* ***helping us to reflect on our values.*** *What was it surprising to us? What we're expecting, does it help us to refine our values? You know****, is there a learning concession built into that cycle? As opposed to we need some evidence guys because we're gonna be under the hammer from, you know, we're gonna lose some of our budget next year if we don't get this evidence****. So shortcut* ***let's just collect that stuff that's easy to***

		***measure**. Get some data together. Don't care too much about how you use it **because it's just getting a job done. No learning. We've done the job. We've got the funding**. We wait…it's so depressing, but it's how the world works generally speaking (10, EP7)* *It's a really dangerous thing. So EBP for me is like I think we hold it- we'd hold it up as being a really like, a really good thing. But **I wouldn't know if I want that to be the detriment of the, just seeing the situation as it's occurring on its own merit.** (21, EP1)*
Application of Evidence *Interpret*	Evidence is what you choose it to be- contextual, postmodern, wicked problems	*So I guess I'm a little post-modern in my kind of thinking in terms of, you know, **evidence is anything you choose to make it anyway**. And it's the **questions around power in that like who gets to say what evidence it is**, and who owns that, and who has priority, and who has control over it. (10, EP7)* *I feel like **another danger of the profession is that we become fortune tellers** or something where we have a sense that we know is gonna… To me **evidence has the connotation that you know what is gonna be better in the future**. You know what should happen. Like you're consulting something to tell you what should happen. So like again evidence, I don't know, I feel like a little bit, I feel a bit wary of it. But if I was going to answer your question in a more direct way, I would say evidence is… I don't know; I suppose it's a **compromise between being as informed as you can be about the previous literature** and **your own experiences** etc. and what you've learnt from that. And **fitting that as closely as you can to what's going on**. But I suppose what I'm trying to acknowledge is that you never have evidence for exactly what's going on. So it's **kind of a compromise**. (21, EP1)* *…but I would say there are **different EBPs**. There are **EBP for things that I think are absolute nonsense.** (4, SEP13)*

In category (D) Critical Theorist, rationale for an EP thinking about EBP like a critical theorist is ensuring that practice is authentic to the practitioner's values. EBP is an emancipatory tool that is used in accordance with own values and beliefs. Knowledge use is contextualised. Trust is achieved through the integrity of the practitioner. It is important that the application of evidence is interpreted as it needs to be put into a meaningful context that is appropriate for the desired outcome. EBP is what you choose it to be as it is always contextual and therefore postmodern. Problems that EPs are asked to help with are often wicked problems, in that a presenting problem is often interconnected in nature and there is often incomplete knowledge. These dimensions bring into focus that in this way of conceptualising EBP, the focus is on fulfilling a moral obligation, which seems to be considered from an ontological perspective and based on values and power.

4.4.3 Distribution of conceptions.

The outcome space (Subsection 4.4.1) shows the qualitatively different ways that EBP could be understood and these were grouped into four categories of description. It should be emphasised again that each category of description within the outcome space describes one way of experiencing EBP, based on different conceptions of EBP. Categories of description have been formulated from characteristics identified in the analysis of the data from the participant group as a whole, not any one individual. However, each participant did express more than one way of conceiving (and enacting) EBP during the interview. The analysis of the data revealed that each EP had a dominating conception of EBP in their discourse but that other conceptions were evident in what they said. The distribution of the ways of conceptualising EBP as conceptions among the participants is shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Four ways of conceptualising EBP.

Participant	**Years as an EP**	**Level of EP training:** M for Masters and D for Doctorate	**(A) Detective** ***In focus: EBP as what works- to justify and understand the basis***	**(B) Bricoleur** ***In focus: EBP as what works to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods***	**(C) Manager** ***In focus: EBP as what works being demonstrable, evaluated and shared in the community***	**(D) Critical Theorist** ***In focus: EBP as what works being chosen based on values and power for the task of emancipation.***	**Training Provider:** Each listed alphabetically and then assigned a letter in order from Z-L.
1	13	M, D	++	+			U, Y
2	14	M		+	++		M
3	5	D	+	++			M
4	13	M	+	++		+	L
5	5	D	++	+			Y
6	-1	D	+	++	+		U
7	17	M	+	++	+		U
8	27	M		+	++	+	L
9	17	M		+	++		U
10	7	D		+	+	++	U
11	14	D	++	+	+		U
12	2	D	+	++			P
13	4	D	++	+			T
14	3	D		++			Y
15	17	M		+	++		U
16	7	M	++	+			P
17	11	M, D		+	++		Y
18	3	D	+	++			U
19	3	D	+	++			U
20	-2	D	+	++			S
21	1	D		+		++	Y
22	13	M, D		+	++		V, M
Total of dominating conception			5	9	6	2	
Twenty-two EPs' dominating (++) and non-dominating (+) ways of conceptualising EBP.							

Table 8 also provides information about the years of experience as an EP each participant had and whether they had completed masters or doctoral training (or both). A minus number indicates that the participant is TEP, for example -1 indicates that the participant is in the third and final year of training before qualifying. The letter D denotes that participants have undertaken doctoral training in educational psychology and the letter M denotes that participants have undertaken Masters level training in educational psychology.

The data in Table 8, shows in a rudimentary fashion, that the number of years' experience an EP has is not necessarily indicative of having a particular conception of EBP. For example, an EP with the most years' experience (participant 8) and an EP with the least years' experience (participant 21) post-training both held a conception of EBP as what works is a choice based on values and power and operating as a critical theorist.

I have presented information about where the participant has undertaken their professional training, which shows there is no linear relationship between where the participant trained and their dominating conception of EBP. Each training provider was allocated a letter as part of the coding system used to protect participants' identities.

4.4.4 Relationship between the categories (A) Detective, (B) Bricoleur, (C) Manager, (D) Critical Theorist.

The different ways of understanding, A, B, C, and D have aspects of the profession in focus but from different perspectives, which could be seen as systemic. These perspectives move from the individual (self) focus of A, out to the child in B and then a service level focus in C, with category D being more philosophical. The five EPs with the dominant conception A had the principles and professional responsibilities of EBP in focus. The nine EPs with the dominant conception B had the child in focus. It should be noted that the child has meaning for the other ways that EBP is conceptualised, and the child is also benefited from the outcomes of all categories. In C, the six EPs with this dominant conception had the profession as a service in focus and this has to function well so that the child's needs are met. To that end, the EP seeks to

provide reassurance and defend/promote the profession. In category D, the focus is on practising psychology in accordance with one's values and worldview and making choices in the use of EBP to achieve positive outcomes in a way that is authentic to the self, which could be argued is a moral perspective. This was two EPs' dominant conception.

The distribution of conceptions has been used to explore the relationship between the categories, as although the categories are presented at a collective level the dominant conceptions provide useful information about the prevalence of ways of understanding. As was stated above the EPs expressed conceptions of EBP that went across the different categories. Therefore, categories represent a breadth of conceptions which were expressed by individuals, but do not represent the conceptions of specific individuals and instead represent the range of understanding communicated by all the participants. The four categories of understanding and their internal relations constitute the outcome space (Table 3, Subsection 4.4.1).

The structure of the outcome space from this research is not hierarchical as is usually expected in a phenomenographic study. I propose that transitions in conceptualisations across the categories from A to B to C to D would be in response to the context and problem as presented. Therefore, the four ways of understanding EBP constitute a heterarchy, where the relationship between each element of the model is flexible and dynamic and is dependent on the context and the desired outcome, which indicates that EBP is situational.

4.5 Discussion

4.5.1 Summary of findings

The phenomenographic analysis of the interview transcripts identified four qualitatively different ways in which EBP is conceptualised by a group of EPs. The phenomenon of EBP in educational psychology is represented by these four categories of descriptions:

A) *Detective*: EBP as *what works* to justify and understand the basis to meet professional responsibilities.

B) *Bricoleur:* EBP as *what works* to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods to be child and solution focused.
C) *Manager*: EBP as *what works* being demonstrable, evaluated and shared with the community to provide a service and uphold a professional reputation.
D) *Critical Theorist*: EBP as *what works* being chosen based on values and power for the task of emancipation to fulfil a moral obligation.

The variation in conceptualisations of EBP was presented in the form of an outcome space (Table 3, Subsection 4.4.1), which provided a holistic view of the participants' conceptualisations and a direct visual outline of systemic differences across the categories of description.

Each category shows a different focus in the conceptualisation of EBP in educational psychology as it encapsulates "what" the participant's attention is focused on and "how" the phenomenon is described (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). The foci of the categories of description are A) professional responsibilities, B) child and solution focused outcomes, C) providing a service and upholding a professional reputation and D) moral obligation, which are all different perceptions of duty. The logical relationship between the categories is that in each category a different perspective of the profession is in focus, which together could be seen as systemic: A) professional self, B) client, C) service, with D), having a philosophical perspective. The extent of variation between the categories was based on the themes of Rationale, Knowledge Use, Trust and Application of Evidence. These themes shaped the four ways of understanding EBP as a heterarchy rather than a hierarchy, which implies that the relationship between the categories is flexible and dynamic. Thus, the conceptualisations of EBP are contextual as they seem to reflect an ecological perspective.

4.5.2 Discussion in light of the literature reviewed and methodology

The findings demonstrate that there is a broad range of understandings of EBP in educational psychology, suggesting that the concept has many facets, which is in line ways of understanding EBP in social work (Avby, Nilsen & Abrandt Dahlgren, 2014). The variation seems to represent a situational approach to conceptualising EBP in educational psychology in that EBP is evoked differently

depending on the context. These findings differed from Avby et al.'s (2014) because their research showed a hierarchy in understanding of EBP. This may be due to the variety of stakeholders used as participants, with differing roles and levels of training, rather than only using practitioners.

The outcome space in this study is different to typical outcome spaces in phenomenographical research. Typically the categories in the outcome space are related to one another in a hierarchical way (Marton & Booth, 1997; Sandberg, 1997) or where some categories are inclusive of others (Åkerlind, Bowden, & Green, 2005). However, it would seem that the quality criteria proposed by Marton and Booth (1997) have been met (see Subsection 3.3.2.1) in that each category reveals something distinct about a way of experiencing the phenomenon, each category stands in a logical relationship with other categories, and the number of categories has been determined by the extent of variation.

A phenomenographic analysis is employed to show the variation in the whole of a phenomenon, which is usually hierarchical. Phenomenographic research is usually undertaken in areas such as processes of learning (see Richardson, 1999) where it is supposed that concepts represent a developmental hierarchy. The difference to typical outcome spaces in phenomenographical research could be explained by EBP being considered from an ecological perspective. This reflects that EBP is a multidimensional construct, as it refers to several distinct but related dimensions treated as a single concept (Edwards, 2001). Evidence-based practice is an approach that integrates the elements of research-based evidence, 'clinical expertise' and 'patient characteristics', as per the APA (2006) definition, and also context as per the definition by Briner and Rousseau (2011), therefore each one of these elements may take precedence at a given time, which would be reflected in a heterarchical structure. These conceptualisations of EBP in this study seem to signify the holistic representations of a complex phenomenon and reflect the different dimensions of EBP as a construct and offer broader conceptualisations of evidence than just research. These findings were realised because of the decision made to provide definition during the interview so that the dimensions of EBP could be brought to mind.

In this research the conceptualisations of EBP are contextual and heterarchical, which reflects an ecological perspective. Contextualised conceptualisations of EBP are in line with contextualised conceptualisations of human interaction relevant to the field of educational psychology that are presented by Annan (2005) to support 'situational analysis' as a framework for professional practice and research in educational psychology. Situational analysis is based on an ecological approach to educational psychology, which reflects the EP's work at multiple levels surrounding a child. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development (1979) can provide an explanatory insight into the heterarchical outcome of the phenomenographic analysis. In ecological theory "development reflects, and is, the way people perceive and deal with their unique environments" (Annan, 2005, p.136). Like development is influenced by events occurring at all levels within an ecological framework, so are the different ways that EPs think about EBP. Each conceptualisation is influenced by environmental factors both internal and external to the EP, shown by the balance of professional duties with the demands placed upon them.

The role of the EP is varied and complex, which involves assessing and influencing contexts as well as individuals (Kelly, 2008). The dimensions of variation show how key themes in EBP: Rationale, Knowledge Use, Trust, Application of Evidence, are employed differently; depending on the focus of the what EBP is for, which seems to meet different role demands across the five key areas of educational psychology practice: consultation, training, assessment, intervention, research (BPS, 2002).

The flexibility of EBP as a construct can also be understood in terms of the situational theory of leadership. Situational approaches to leadership argue that effective leadership is largely determined by features of the context in which leaders operate (see Cooper & McGaugh, 1963). In the situational theory of leadership, a leader adapts their style to fit the situation and the needs of the individuals involved. The uncertainty created by the potential conflict between professional ethics and organisational demands requires sensitivity and judgement (Webster & Lunt, 2002). Therefore, an adaptive style of EBP seems

appropriate and it follows that maintaining the 'professionality' of EPs can be met in this situational approach.

In the literature review, the model of EBP by Satterfield et al. (2009) was presented, which showed different spheres of influence that contribute to EBP. The authors had not established if there was a dominance of any sphere when contributing to decision making. The findings from this study show that there was a greater prevalence of the conception of EBP as B) 'Bricoleur', where 'what works' is to create something that is helpful from a range of sources, skills, and methods. In this conceptualisation, it is important that the application of evidence is relational. This may reflect a prevalence of the use of consultation in EP practice with a joint problem-solving approach and the constructionist nature of EP work. Indeed, the term bricoleur was used by Burnham (2013) to describe the commonplace situational and improvised methods used in EP practice. This finding supports the need to have a definition of EBP that captures the intricacy of joint problem exploration and power relationships in decision making, as put forward in Chapter 2.

The findings also showed that there was no linear relationship between where the participant trained and their dominating conception of EBP, which is contrary to what I had expected. My first impression after conducting the interviews, was that I felt that differences in how participants conveyed their experience of EBP would be largely influenced by their training experiences as this was a significant topic that was talked about in the interviews. This is also significant from my perspective as a trainee as I am currently immersed in this context and so it seems highly relevant to me. However, the findings have not necessarily shown this, which supports the idea put forward by Burnham (2013) that EPs' practice is "primarily an articulation of personal attributes, value and beliefs whose development preceded professional training rather than being acquired as a part of that training" (p.23). This has important implications for educational training in any case, particularly the recruitment of TEPs as certain pre-training experiences, and personal values and attributes may then be an essential part of the person specification for a TEP. The study by Burnham (2013) was with EPs who had trained under the Masters level of training, and this highlighted that there might be differences in practitioner attitudes based on

the level of training. This study had EPs who have had doctoral-level training and doctoral level continuous professional development. This level of training supposes that the EBP agenda may have had more prominence than at Masters level, and practitioners may make more reference to the scientific evidence-base informing their practice. However, the distribution of conceptions in Subsection 4.4.4 shows that this is not necessarily the case.

Urquhart (2012) suggested that although differences do exist among practitioner understandings of EBP, these differences do not prevent a broadly compatible shared understanding to emerge. The findings from this study do not refute this as the different conceptualisations of EBP uncover the flexibility of the construct, which may be why people's interpretations differ. As a construct is an idea that is agreed upon by many people; it may be that EBP within educational psychology needs to be defined with greater clarity. It could be argued that it is good to have different and more complex interpretations in order to meet different situations, which is what is indicated in the findings. However, a suitable definition could reflect these frames of reference and provide a sound epistemological framework for educational psychology in practice.

The main findings demonstrate that EBP in educational psychology work is characterised by the varying use of evidence. The findings indicate how EPs may have different conceptualisations of EBP, which fulfil a variety of functions under different circumstances. These conceptualisations have implications for practice including recognition of the value of different perspectives, self-reflection in practitioner training; increased understanding of the dimensions of EBP as a construct; and development of a definition to the purpose of educational psychology. The variation in conceptualisations of evidence-practice reflect the ways in which EBP is enacted in practice.

To date, the discussion of EBP within educational psychology has tended towards a specific research-focused definition of EBP. The present conceptualisations contribute to our understanding of EBP in educational psychology as they suggest that EBP has various functions in educational psychology. The findings also suggest that EPs may use different constructs of

EBP, dependent on such variables as the context and the client's needs, personal preferences of the EP, and the problem formulation. There is no denying the importance of research evidence. However, the other elements of the definition have an important role to play, and this research shows this.

This new framework for conceptualising EBP raises important questions about how it may be researched, trained and developed by practitioners. There are many potential benefits for EPs and researchers resulting from these new conceptualisations. The suggestion that EBP occurs at different levels (e.g. the self, the child and the service) may enable EPs to determine which levels they customarily use and whether their use is appropriate. The role of self-reflection and reflexivity in EBP is therefore critical.

4.5.3 Summary

In addressing the research question, "How do EPs conceptualise EBP in Educational Psychology?", the findings describe the variation in EPs' understanding of EBP. The findings provide a more nuanced understanding of how EBP is thought about, in that EBP in educational psychology is contextual and dependent on the situation and the primary duty of the EP at that time, which further suggests that how an EP conceptualises EBP is ecological in perspective.

5. Phase 2

Phase two of the research sought to explore how practice decisions of EPs are influenced by EBP. This research objective was influenced by the assertion that EBP is the “conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions” (Sackett et al., 1996, p.71). Thus, decision-making is the end-point of the EBP approach (Maudsley & Strivens, 2000) and was used as a focus to explore further EPs’ perceptions of EBP.

Phase two extends phase one, as seven participants who participated in phase one continued to phase two. Focus groups were used because they provide an opportunity for reflection and refinement which can deepen participants' insights into their circumstances, attitudes or behaviour, which as a group process illuminate the research issue (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). Therefore, I wanted to use the insights and data from the interactions within the group to enhance interpretation of the ways in which EPs understand and experience EBP and contribute to the overall research aim of producing a meaningful understanding of how EBP is understood in educational psychology. Phase two was conducted before the analysis of phase one was complete, although emerging themes of theme one did inform the data collection of phase two. Therefore, the purpose of phase two in enhancing interpretation will be fully realised in the overall discussion in Chapter 6.

The participants, materials and procedure for conducting the research in phase two are discussed in Section 5.1, followed by the ethical considerations in Section 5.2. The process of data analysis is described in Section 5.3, which leads on to the presentation of the findings from the framework analysis of the focus group data in Section 5.4. Finally, in Section 5.5, the findings are discussed to address the research question: “How are the ways in which EPs make decisions in practice influenced by EBP?”

5.1 Method

The focus group method was chosen to extend the other work in phase one as focus groups as a method may serve to elaborate or qualify other findings

(Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). In order to deepen my understanding of the phenomenon of EBP I sought to consider EBP in relation to its purpose- that is being applied in decision-making. This would be achieved by collecting and analysing different data on the same topic (Bloor et al.,2001), In focus groups, participants are encouraged to discuss specific topics so that underlying issues (norms, beliefs, values), common to the participants, might be uncovered. These issues are uncovered by engaging in collective "retrospective introspection", for which the group is a socially legitimated occasion (Bloor et al., 2001, p. 6).

A rationale for the focus group method is the data generated because of the interaction between members of the group. These interactions are vital and are thought to create a 'synergistic effect' (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007), allowing participants to respond to the views and reactions of others, therefore revealing information that would not be elicited by other methods. Differences of opinion among group members also help researchers identify how and why individuals embrace or reject particular ideas (Bloor et al., 2001). The interactions are a strength as participants may challenge each other's point of view, or extend and develop statements, thereby generating rich data (Willig 2010). Focus groups provide opportunities for the clarification of responses, for follow-up questions, and for the probing of responses. (Bloor et al., 2001)

Facilitation in the focus group is about generating in-depth discussion via a logical sequence of open-ended questions that encourages universal participation within the group (Parker & Tritter, 2006). Producing focused interactions is a strength of the focus group. The process of which raises issues about both the role of the moderator in generating the data and the impact of the group itself on the data (Morgan, 1996). A weakness of the focus group is when these focused interactions do not occur. Findings could be influenced by knowingly or unknowingly providing cues about what types of responses and answers are desirable or seeking to achieve group consensus on particular topics (Bloor et al., 2001). However, my centrality in this research means that subjectivity is unavoidable and research influence is acknowledged as part of my paradigmatic position.

5.1.1 Participants.

Participants are asked to engage in focus groups because they have something in common with each other (Parker & Tritter, 2006). The participants in phase two had taken part in the phase one interview. Participant characteristics are shown in Table 9, including identification of the focus group attended. As participants had discussed EBP in depth in phase one, they had time to reflect on the issues raised in the interviews and to consider what the construct means to them. The method chosen employs co-operative inquiry as a strategy. Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to yourself (Heron, 1996). Reason (1994) states that co-operative inquiry is more likely to be successful with a group of people who experience themselves as relatively empowered and who wish to explore and develop their practice together. An advantage of recruiting participants from phase one is that the participants have indicated an interest in the research topic and a willingness to systematically explore and develop their practice.

The sampling for this research was purposive and included snowballing methods as I was contacting participants from the previous phase of the study (Ritchie, Lewis, Elham, Tennant, & Rahim, 2013). Participants were invited to attend a focus group based on their locality as I wanted the focus group to be conducted in person rather than through any virtual means. Therefore, participants were from educational psychology services in the south west of England. Some participants were in the same service, so there were coordinated replies to my email invitation to participate. I contacted potential participants individually via email and provided them with the participant information sheet and consent form (Appendix C). I assured participants that there was no obligation to take part in phase two and that participation was entirely voluntary, with withdrawal possible at any time. The first focus group consisted of four participants from two different services and the second focus group consisted of three participants from the same service. I had hoped to have five in each, but the logistics of convening the groups did not allow this. However, depth of data was more important than a range of views, as variation in the understanding of EBP was established in phase one, so the small group size facilitated this.

Table 9 Focus group participant characteristics.

Focus Group Participant Characteristics									
Focus Group	**Participant**	**Gender**	**Educational psychology service**	**Training provider**	**EP qualification level**	**Year Qualified**	**Years EP**	**Grade (Years in a senior role)**	**Qualifications**
1	4	M	17	L	M	2004	13	SEP (3.5)	BEd, OU degree, MEd Psy
1	6	F	17	U	D	2017	TEP Y3	TEP	Degree, PGCE, DEd Psy
1	10	M	4	U	D	2010	7	EP	Degree, DEd Psy
2	18	F	3	U	D	2014	3	EP	BEd, MSc conversion, DEd Psy
2	19	F	3	U	D	2014	3	EP	Degree, DEd Psy
2	20	F	3	S	D	2018	TEP Y2	TEP	Degree, PGCE, MSc conversion, DEd Psy
1	21	M	4	Y	D	2016	1	EP	Degree, MSc conversion, DEd Psy
N.B. The participant number is the same for phase two as in phase one.									
Key: Educational Psychology Service: 18 services were contacted. These were listed alphabetically and then numbered. Training Provider: 14 training providers were included in this sample of participants. These were listed alphabetically and then assigned a letter in order from Z-L. Qualifications: DEd Psy- Doctorate in Educational Psychology, MEd Psy- Master of Educational Psychology degree, MSc- Master of Science degree, MSc RMP- Master of Science in Research Methods in Psychology, PGCE- Post Graduate Certificate in Education, OU- Open University									

5.1.2 Materials.

The focus groups were convened to discuss and comment on, from their own experience, the topic of the research question: “How are the ways in which EPs make decisions influenced by EBP?”

The focus group involved the participants considering four questions (Table 10). In addition to the questions, three definitions of EBP were provided as stimuli for consideration (Appendix H). These were printed on sheets on the table and presented on a screen using PowerPoint accordingly. This research strategy of setting ‘focusing exercises’ for the group, i.e. the questions posed, was to give impetus to the group interaction (Bloor et al., 2001).

Table 10 Focus group questions provided as prompts.

	Focus Group Questions
1.	How do EPs make decisions in practice? What is the influence of scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models in practitioner expertise and judgement?
2.	Where does an EBP approach fit in with scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models?
3.	How would you define EBP in Educational Psychology?
	Stimuli for question 3, shown in Appendix H i. Model by Satterfield, Spring, Brownson, Mullen, Newhouse, Walker, and Whitlock (2009) ii. Definition of EBMgt by Briner and Rousseau (2011a) iii. Definition of EBP in psychology by APA (2006)
4.	How should EBP in educational psychology be taught?

5.1.3 Procedure.

The focus groups were conducted in January 2018 as two separate focus groups, each lasting one hour. Each was a ‘single focus group’, where participants are placed in one group to discuss a topic interactively. This classical type of focus group discussion is the most common (Morgan, 1996).

Both focus groups followed the same format. I informed all participants about the remit and scope of the overall project, which included a brief overview of the initial themes emerging from the ongoing analysis of the phase one data. In sharing my findings thus far, I intended to encourage the ethos of co-operative enquiry. Then followed an outline of the format of the focus group, and the processes of data transcription, analysis and dissemination. Participants were given the information sheet to re-read and a consent form (Appendix C) on which they were asked to agree to the audio recording and transcription of the group discussion, and to the use of anonymised quotes in reports and publications.

The focus group discussion then began. The procedure was guided by a prompt sheet I devised based on the advice of Finch, Lewis and Turley (2013) and is shown in Appendix H.

5.1.3.1 Reflection on the procedure.

The small size of the focus group enabled a fruitful discussion, and all participants were engaged and encouraged to contribute, by myself as a moderator but also by other participants, who seemed genuinely interested in hearing others' points of view, as shown in this excerpt:

> *I was quite interested by what you were saying. It felt like when you were talking then that the idea of having a consciously held model lacked congruence and it didn't seem to reflect your authentic self* (FG1-10, EP7)

Participants were encouraged to elaborate on what they had said, and it also enabled questioners to reflect on their positions.

> *"Maybe I've misunderstood the concept of the scientist-practitioner, but to me, that is part of what I do in terms of kind of hypothesis testing and kind of in consultation."* (FG2-20, TEP)
>
> *"No, I think your definition, I think that the fact it comes from the HCPC and that it's supposed to be what we're doing as part of our role I think your definition is more accurate. I think we're interpreting it kind of like maybe in a [training provider] way."* (FG2-18, EP3)
>
> *"Maybe it's reflective of our training experiences and maybe the emphasis, the huge emphasis that's placed on reflection."* (FG2-19, EP3)

The participants in focus group two knew each other well, and they were comfortable in challenging in each other.

I was nervous before the focus groups as I was unsure of the dynamics of the groups and how the participants would interact, so I was prepared with strategies to facilitate discussion. However, the interchange of views was fluid in both groups, and I did not need to use many of the tips I had prepared on the prompt sheet (Appendix H). There was a great deal of in-depth discussion and interaction, so much so that in focus group two that the transcription was very difficult due to all the interjection and over talking. Both groups demonstrated

that they did wish to explore the topic and to consider the implications for their practice.

5.2 Ethical Considerations

As per the guidance of Brinkman and Kvale (2008) ethical principles relating to informed consent, confidentiality, consequences, and the role of the researcher were reflected on throughout the process. These ethical principles are also included in Section 3.5. However, it was important to consider the particular issues related to focus groups, particularly in groups with people who already know each other.

I was careful to be aware of the status, position, and specific needs of the participants and to offer reassurances regarding data sensitivity and confidentiality. Although participant confidentiality on the part of the researcher can be assured, it is difficult with focus groups to ensure participants themselves will adhere to such provisos. Therefore, participants need to be reminded of the confidentiality and anonymity guarantees offered by me as the researcher and their obligations to respect each other's wishes concerning confidentiality (Bloor et al., 2001). This was important as participants would potentially be sharing information about their practice and how it is in line or not, with overall service objectives, as well as experiences with clients, and of training. Opinions on these things may have been sensitive or controversial so creating a supportive and open forum for discussion was essential.

Pre-existing groups can be valuable for exploring shared meanings and contexts such as how an organisation understands a policy objective and how this translates into practice (Finch, Lewis & Turley, 2013). Participants may feel more relaxed and less inhibited in the co-presence of friends and colleagues. And they may feel empowered and supported in the co-presence of those similarly situated to themselves. Nevertheless, there is a danger that shared assumptions mean issues are not fully elaborated because their meaning is taken for granted (Finch, Lewis & Turley, 2013). However, as I am a “practitioner-researcher” (Robson, 2002) and have my own experience of the

participants' job role, this was not much of an issue and was easily addressed by asking for clarification.

In focus group one, there were two participants from two services, both in a locality to attend the same annual CPD event, which meant that some participants knew others to greater or lesser degrees. Despite a TEP and a SEP making up the participants with hierarchical differences in their responsibilities and powers, which may have affected their participation, the discussion was productive, and everyone contributed a point of view.

In focus group two, there were three participants from the same service, one of whom was a TEP. It is argued that small group size (fewer than four) means that the focus group loses some of the qualities of being a group (Finch, Turley & Turley, 2013). However, as the participants in focus group two knew each other well the discussion was engrossing and comprehensive.

It was important to consider that some participants may need an opportunity to review the experience of the group in individual debriefings after the focus group. This was offered to all participants, but none felt it was necessary.

Breen (2006) provides some golden rules for overcoming common ethical issues in focus groups, and these were adhered to throughout the process: 1) Put your interviewees at ease, 2) Assure confidentiality, 3) Establish a rapport, 4) Explain the interview format and the sequence of topics, 5) If necessary to make notes, explain why, 6) Provide supplementary exploration; prompts, 7) Avoid bias, 8) Avoid piling questions on top of each other (confuses), 9) Keep pace up and stick to time, 10) Be ready with further advice.

5.3 Thematic Framework Analysis

The data from the focus groups were analysed using a thematic framework approach (Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003). A thematic framework approach involves a five-stage process of data analysis: familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting and mapping and interpretation. Table 11 shows the five stages of data analysis in the framework approach, adapted

from Pope, Ziebland and Mays (2000), and my approach to each of these stages is presented afterwards. Examples of how these stages were undertaken are shown in Appendix I.

Table 11 Five stages of data analysis in the framework approach (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000).

Stage	Description
1. Familiarisation	Immersion in the data by listening to and reading transcript data to list key ideas and any emergent themes.
2. Identifying thematic framework	Identifying the key concepts, ideas, and themes by which the data can be examined, coded, and referenced. This uses both a priori objectives as well as issues emergent from the data.
3. Indexing	Applying the framework systematically to all data using framework codes.
4. Charting	Rearranging the data according to the thematic framework and forming charts representing themes against cases. This involves charting each theme, using distilled summaries of the main points from each participant (case). This process requires abstraction and synthesis.
5. Mapping and interpretation	The charts are used to define concepts, map the range and nature of phenomena, create typologies and find associations with the themes, to provide explanations for the findings. Influenced by the research objectives and the emergent themes.

1. Familiarisation

I transcribed the focus group recordings in the semi-verbatim style outlined in Section 4.3. Each focus group transcript was read at least four times to ensure familiarisation. The printed transcripts were annotated with standout ideas, and a spidergram of these notes was made to begin forming links and identifying emerging themes from the data (see Appendix I1 for an example of notes made during data familiarisation).

2. **Identifying thematic framework**

The framework for analysing the focus group data was constructed using a priori issues informed by phase one of the study; that is the key themes (dimensions of variation) that served to link and separate the different ways of understanding EBP. These four themes represent variation in perceptions of rationale, use of knowledge, trust and application of evidence. These were chosen for coding as they reflect what was identified in phase one as being common themes when thinking about EBP, experienced in different ways, and thus were considered important here. Also chosen were definitional dimensions of EBP, namely: context, client, expertise and research evidence because this might provide insight into the relative contributions of each dimension. These eight coding themes are shown in the index in Appendix I2.

3. **Indexing**

In this phase, the data were coded using NVivo qualitative data analysis software, as this programme supports the data summary and display function distinctive of the 'framework' approach (Appendix I3) (Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor & Barnard, (2014). My decision to make use of an electronic method of coding in phase two and a manual method of coding in phase one is explored further in Appendix E3.

4. Charting

Separate subject charts were created for each coding theme and entries made for several respondents on each chart using NVivo (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Subject charts of the thematic analysis are shown in Appendix I4. The themes were modified throughout the process as recurring and significant themes were identified as part of the mapping and interpretation process.

5. **Mapping and interpretation**

Responses were compared between the participants on the subject charts, which I had printed out. The comparisons allowed me to develop an understanding of the data and develop patterns and themes related to decision-making, which I achieved through interpretive engagement. These themes were organised as 'thematic networks' (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Attride-Stirling (2001) suggested that these networks provide a technique to explore the overt

structures and underlying patterns within the data. I found them to be a useful tool to organise my analysis and identify links between themes and refine them.

See Appendix I5 for thematic maps illustrating the iterative identification of themes. The concepts within the final iteration of each theme, are provided in Appendix I6, supported by participant quotes. At this stage, three overarching themes were identified, and the results are organised according to these as main themes in 5.4.

5.3.1 Reflection on the analytical process

Although a framework approach was chosen for the thematic analysis, which suggests a more formulaic approach to developing themes, the mapping and interpretation stage was a creative and interpretive endeavour. Themes were developed inductively, and through an interpretive lens, patterns in the data were identified with a view to informing the community of EPs about EBP in this field. This generation of themes was aided by questioning what the implications of the theme might mean and what they communicated. Therefore, as an applied researcher using a framework approach, I felt that the themes needed to offer something concrete to the community, which is why the main themes represent something overarching and practical. This reflects my position and how I have conceptualised the data as a descriptive account of EP practice through a semantic approach. This allowed me to identify themes on a surface level rather than looking for the deeper meaning behind what the participant had said (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

5.4 Findings

Phase two of the research aimed to address the research question, “How are the ways in which EPs make decisions in practice influenced by EBP?”. I identified themes in participants’ understanding and interpretation of EBP and decision making in practice by using a framework analysis.

The following subsections describe how the construct of EBP was thought about in relation to making decisions. These include viewing EBP as a strand running through the work or as a tool, rather than as the overarching framework

and as a set of actions to uphold the credibility of the profession. Quotes from participants are included to expand and illustrate the points made. The semi-verbatim transcription has been edited in these excerpts to remove repetition of words and utterances to present clearly what the participant said. Ellipses indicate words omitted in the interest of brevity and relevance. Words in parenthesis either show an interjection by another participant or are more generic terms used to protect anonymity. Participant quotes are coded by focus group number, participant number and grade as an EP, as shown in Table 9 in 5.1.1.

This research was exploratory, and the themes identified through the framework approach are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 Themes and sub-themes arising from framework analysis of the focus group data.

Main Theme	**Themes**	**Concepts**
Contextual factors	• Expectations	• Who's asking • Expert
	• Relationships	• Relational aspects solve more than the evidence-base • Being understood
	• Narrating complexity	• Nuances • Complex system • Political agenda • Holistic • Narrative
Training and practice experience	• Practice-based evidence (PBE)	• Aspirations • Reality • Evaluation • Own knowledge • Confidence
	• Research to support and rationalise	• Accountability • Not dominant • Funnelling • Role
	• Developing skills	• Wide spectrum • Develop over time

	and understanding	• Psychological understanding • Knowing • Lens
Personal characteristics	• Identity- this who I am and what I prefer	• Personal preferences • What sort of practitioner
	• Integrity- I value what I know I know and don't know	• Epistemology • Artist-scientist • Values

These themes and concepts were identified from participants describing how they made decisions in practice and how these were influenced by models of practice or their understanding of EBP as shown by how they would define it or how the approach should be taught. The focus group questions are shown in Table 10 in Section 5.1.2. The main themes will now be presented to detail the analysis of how EBP influences decision-making as explored in the focus groups in Subsections 5.4.1 – 5.4.3. Within each subsection, further subsections delineate the themes. Within the text, concepts are emboldened, and exemplary data extracts are provided. Although the main themes, themes and concepts are distinct from one another they interrelate and overlap, which will be considered in the discussion in Section 5.5.

5.4.1 Contextual factors.

It was acknowledged by all participants that decision making in educational psychology is a complex process due to the complex nature of the systems that EPs work in and the variety of things that need to be considered in their work. Both focus groups felt the demands of national and local policy requirements.

> *Things are changing with education and DfE, and what people want and the new problems and new pressures of things arise because of all these new pressures like it's shifting quite a lot and it's messy.* (FG2-18, EP3)

How EPs navigated their complex working systems was illustrated by them making sense of what was being asked of them and why. To maintain relationships and provide desired outcomes for clients that were congruent with EP values narratives are constructed to mediate these often-messy demands.

5.4.1.1 Expectations of EPs.

Expectations from those **who are asking** for EP services affect how EPs make decisions. The expectations of other professions who also feel the demands of national and local policy requirements were significant in affecting practice decisions. It was highlighted that some schools want to use the EP for their own agenda rather than focusing on the needs of the child. Educational psychology involvement may be sought by schools to show evidence of something for their purposes, and in some cases, the involvement of the EP *is* the EBP in the eyes of the school. Being asked to do particular pieces of work could pose an ethical dilemma for the EP if what they are being commissioned to do does not seem appropriate or is not in the best interests of the child.

> *She was kind of saying like 'we're running out of time, can you, we want to evidence like he's making progress, can you come in and do something individually with him?'* (FG2-18, EP3)

It was also felt that the scope of the EP role was being limited by pressures of increased statutory work, which requires alignment with SEN procedures and an 'expert' approach to identifying need and describing education provision. Therefore, it was felt that it was important to consider how evidence is selected and presented and given context.

> *We present evidence because we might, well for whatever reason, so is it something about how we select and present evidence and give it a context?* (FG1-10, EP7)

The statutory presentation of evidence is different to the collaborative sharing of evidence in consultation

It was discussed that being paid for a service has created some service expectations from schools, and there was a sense of being forced into an **expert** role because of this. There was a perception in some cases of being paid for an answer and that it was on this basis that EP involvement was judged.

> *So I feel like I'm being forced, maybe more into a scientist, like an expert, people are like I'm paying you this money or, and I feel, I've noticed that I'm feeling more uncomfortable in, since September, in my role and*

> *feeling more judged and more like people are thinking 'I'm paying you I want an answer'.* (FG2-18, EP3)

The EP is in a position where they are negotiating practice due to tensions between client (school) expectations and the use of time, and therefore money to attain desired outcomes. Thus, expectations of families, schools and services are a key influence on decisions made about working with children and young people.

5.4.1.2 Relationships.

The relational aspects of the role were deemed to be more important in problem-solving than the evidence base. It was felt that so much of the EP role depended on relationships and interactions with people that EBP was secondary to this. It was considered that the trust in the EP's judgement is what determines action not the strength of the evidence-base.

> *I develop a really good relationship with a SENCo, and things get done in that school more readily than they would in a school that I don't have any relationship with the SENCo at all.* (FG2-19, EP3)

As such to bring about change, the client needs to feel that they have been understood and that is why the EP is recommending certain things. Otherwise, if the client does not feel understood then, they won't take action.

> *Someone is not going to do it unless they feel they've been understood and you've understood their context, and you've understood the problem and that you get them and therefore that's why you're suggesting this stuff. If they don't feel understood then, they're not going to.* (FG2-18, EP3)

In understanding a client's need, the individual needs are thought of in their unique context and understanding the client's need is paramount.

> *We're not thinking about generalisability, we're thinking about tailoring it to that context, that child, that family, so that's our gold standard.* (FG2-20, TEP)

5.4.1.3 Narrating complexity.

It was expressed that often decisions are made in casework in to construct a narrative to meet expectations and to help a client feel like they have been understood. Problem situations are often 'messy', and therefore complexity is also inherent in professional intervention. The EP role was viewed as situated in the real world, and so intervention needs to be considered in light of many influencing factors. It was felt that the EPs operated in **complex systems,** which was different to clinical settings. Participants recognised the complexity of EBP and how challenging the decision-making process was, especially due to the **nuances** of EP involvement. However, some felt that there were models to support decision-making processes and navigate the complexity, although for others these are internalised. These models are thought to be EBP when considering the full definition. It was recognised that this might not be in line with what is considered EBP within the **political agenda** of a drive for accountability, where EBP was seen as a tool to justify the work carried out and show that educational psychology is worthwhile.

The complexity of a situation may require a story to be told to help make sense of things. Also, recommendations can be presented as an evidence-based product to be more persuasive, particularly if the psychological advice is counter-intuitive.

> *I think it's about that narrative, saying y'know it becomes more than being nice to naughty children, it becomes an intervention based on science. And I think y'know nothing much has changed other than the stories that's being told about what teachers can do to support children.* (FG1-4, SEP13)

Using practitioner experience is considered to be part of a holistic approach to psychology.

> *There is a more holistic approach to what Psychology is, and people do use their personal experience much more and think far more about, rather than what's wrong with this young person, what's going to be most helpful for this young person* (FG1-4, SEP13)

Narratives are constructed to support practitioner expertise and are an important tool for achieving positive outcomes for children. Narratives may also

involve ‘telling a story’ about the (psychometric) data for it to make sense and to support a hypothesis. “*'Evidence' can be a way of depersonalising differing views of a child that can be quite a helpful way of developing a more helpful story”* (FG1-10, EP7). Presenting something as ‘evidence’ can be a way of focusing discussions around a child’s needs in a more neutral way.

EPs make decisions with these different contextual factors in mind. The weighing of these factors will be checked by an awareness of ethical responsibility and the reality of resources and capabilities.

5.4.2 Training and practice experience.

Participants were asked how they thought EBP in educational psychology should be taught. This question intended to elicit thoughts on their own experience of becoming an EP and how they have come to their understandings of EBP. The experiences of EPs showed that they had nuanced understandings of EBP, linked to if it was thought of as a product or a process.

5.4.2.1 Practice-based evidence (PBE).

Contributing to the research-evidence base was an important conception of EBP. One perspective was that it was an **aspiration** to carry out their own research:

> *In terms of my own practice I would like, that would be frustrating for me not to have a chance to kind of do action research with schools or to do some form of contributing to the evidence base within practice just because I feel like we have a responsibility to do that and use those skills and often the context prohibits it.* (FG2-20, TEP)

Aspirations for conducting research were linked to ideals of social justice, and not just the everyday. The ‘everyday’ had a connotation of taking data from casework and preparing it for publication and was linked to the alternate perspective of not having an interest in formalising PBE into research outputs at all. It was also realised that contextual factors and the **reality** of everyday work might inhibit PBE and implementation of EBP.

> *There’s always the contextual stuff around like these are the ideals, and this is what we want to do, but always in our job or research or whatever*

there's always the context of like ok but does that fit with the context and the reality and the day-to-day. (FG2-18, EP3)

The reality of everyday work inhibiting PBE included having less opportunity to review work carried out. Not all schools are including **evaluation** as part of the piece of work carried out by the EP and concerns were expressed about not being able to get the feedback to reflect on whether it's worked, other than anecdotally. However, participants suggested that PBE can be about knowing what works from their **own knowledge**. Knowledge is gleaned from what is seen and is important in informing practice: "*if they've seen in their practice that it's effective it's practice-based evidence"* (FG2-20, TEP). However, having data was felt to be important in supporting what they see and is related to feeling a sense of professional **confidence**.

5.4.2.2 Research to support and to rationalise.

Participants were conscious of wanting to promote a good image of themselves, and the profession as a whole, to a wider audience, to gain respect and to inspire trust and confidence a profession in which they take pride. It was recognised that EPs needed to demonstrate their **accountability** and that deferring to the research base helped to provide that. This is linked to having a sense of professional confidence, and this is something that data can provide. Though questions were raised about the purpose of EBP*: "who is the EBP for? Is it for ourselves as practitioners? Is it for the people we are writing the reports for? Is it for the young people? Who is the evidence-base actually benefiting?"* (FG1-6, TEP).

There was a strong sense that an evidence-based approach was **not the dominant factor** influencing practice, "*It feels like another tool in the box for me rather than the overarching framework for everything that I do".* (FG1-10, EP7) An EBP approach was seen broadly as a way of supporting practice decisions in certain circumstances. Some took an EBP approach in circumstances where there is a clearer idea of what factor might be influencing a situation, such as a diagnosis, for example, Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA). An EBP approach included thinking about the research evidence and previous experience of working with a similar case before and then assessing the

usefulness of these in the context. It is noted that this scenario is more like the medical context from which EBP originated. A **funnelling** analogy was applied, as the EP started big looking at an area and then refined it based on context. It was acknowledged that the funnelling approach requires access to journal databases.

It was felt that EPs did have the skills to be critical readers of research but that this isn't necessarily valued by the service as most EPs only have **access** to journal databases through their union membership. Sharing experiences and research at other forums, such as conferences, was seen as another way of accessing research and current good practice. Staying abreast of current research was also felt to be limited by the busy nature of the job and is often not the top priority so, regarding achieving a work-life balance, reading research may not be deemed vital to practice.

> *So I think, personally, when you become qualified, and you're, and as you get into the job and as things become very busy, it's really hard to fit that in… do I want to go home at 5 or 7 o'clock tonight…*(FG2-19, EP3)

A narrative from training- of EPs having an identity crisis, was put forward as a reason for the necessity of maintaining research skills as that was what was the unique contribution of the **role**,

> *So it's trying to figure out where it all fits together. I think you're right; I think that is really important to our role because it is what people may deem to be the scientific bit that we do if they perhaps place more value on the scientist-practitioner aspect* (FG1-19, EP3)

Questions were raised about who wanted the research skills and the expectations of training and how they related to the job.

> *Why did it become from a masters to a doctorate and there's something around that research, scientific that we've now become a doctorate and we're, but we don't, in some cases, probably maybe at least half cases, don't use those research skills [post qualification (FG2-19, EP3)]…* (FG2-18, EP3)

A perspective on this came from another participant who felt that EPs were often not consulted in policy documents that related to psychology applied in

education and that this was due to not having status commensurate with clinical psychology, that as a field was seen to contribute more to academia.

> *I feel like EPs, we're always being asked to qualify what we do, is it effective, is it worthwhile, and I think to…strengthen that argument, because clinical psychology still has a higher status, and I think part of that is linked to, well that's just my opinion, but I feel that part of it is, they're much more active in contributing to [academic work (FG2-18, EP3)]* (FG2-20, TEP).

5.4.2.3 Developing skills and understanding

The nature of the work of an EP utilises a **wide spectrum** of skills and has different expected outcomes, which require different approaches.

> *The work of the EP being on one end…, take an example VIG, so very reflective, very much around the relationship you have with the client, and parent, and then right, to coming to the other end of the spectrum about writing advices, which is very expert, lone working, with an outcome.* (FG2-19, EP3)

The majority of participants felt that EBP, as a balance between research and experience, was seen to be **developed over time** through training and their experiences of doing the job. It was felt that the training gave participants a good base level of skills and that the "*training probably prepares us really well to do that, just to question and we do that in our role every day anyway in different reasons"* (FG1-19, EP3). The progression of an EP was described as a journey, and that the starting point for the journey was in the literature.

> *I suppose universities do want to turn out EPs who have their basis in EBP and to say anything else would be dangerous… So I think they would have to say this is best practice, this is available evidence but I would like to think that they put a great emphasis on reflection, supervision, developing a point of view based on that and I think, as you get out of the station as you build up a head of steam you can perhaps leave that, that close scrutiny of literature behind and think ooh actually experience is telling me more.* (FG1-4, SEP13)

The journey for understanding EBP is thought to begin formally in university. Over time this approach is used less and learnt information is 'synthesised' into the EP's way of working. This idea of a journey was reflected in a trainee's

conception of EBP being a reliance on research in the early stages of the career, and that practice skills develop with experience.

> *Maybe it relates to where you are in your career? I'm pretty inexperienced compared to everyone else so they can rely more on their experiences and that intuitive-ness whereas if you're early on the reliance on research is more important until you've built up that experience and can relate.* (FG1-6, TEP)

The complexity of EBP warrants critical consideration and psychological understanding, particularly about decision making as this is a complex process in itself. Gaining a better **psychological understanding** of the complexity of EBP and the process of decision making was deemed to be important as was the development of the critical thinking skills necessary to skilfully adapt in these multifaceted realms of knowledge and understanding. It was felt that this would be mediated by having a better understanding of themselves as an EP.

> *When you make a decision how do you know what that's going to look like in the future? What is the decision-making process that you go through? Is it consciously in your control or is it just because you've had a load of information put in your brain and that's what comes up at a particular time? To me, it's about deepening the psychological understanding.* (FG1-21, EP1)

Gaining a better 'psychological understanding of ourselves as EPs' was considered to be an important part of the decision-making process. A perspective of EBP was that it was considered not to be nuanced enough to be helpful in the consultation practices of an EP, where being present is more valuable. Decisions are made based on what is going on for the EP at a particular time. Therefore, EBP may not fit as a construct in all aspects of an EP's work.

A recurring concept of EBP was that it was linked to **knowing**, which may explain resistance to it as a construct in educational psychology where so much of the work is situated in a context of uncertainty and not knowing.

> *EBP for me has connotations that I'm the person going into a situation who has reference to certain knowledge and certain experience and*

> *things that like which is totally fitting with what I'm seeing now and I'm taking this and I'm planting it there.* (FG1-21, EP1)

There was a feeling that EBP did not always provide the answers or solutions to a problem because much of what answers were needed for has not necessarily been researched. Not **knowing** is an important facet of being an EP and EPs have to work with what is available to them and develop skills to do that.

> *You might use evidence-based but then how that pans out is unknowable. It just draws to mind how we're the complete opposite of a builder where you can see the finished product, and you know what you're starting with, and you have your plans, things like that. To me, that feels that we are just so far removed from that.* (FG1-21, EP1)

It was identified that EPs would look at things differently depending on the context and the **lens** chosen affects that view and also

> *I suppose the different types of evidence could be different for a scientist-practitioner lens and a reflective practitioner lens. Is that EBP or is that PBE and when does the one become the other?* (FG2-19, EP3)

There was an uncertainty about the difference between PBE and EBP and if these were attributable to different models.

Participants felt that training plays an important role in developing the point of view of an EP and what they know and views expressed in the focus groups were often attributed to their training background (e.g. see Subsection 5.3.1). Training was thought to be key to the personal development of the EP. The doctoral training provides exposure to different types of research and trainees are supported to choose their research topics and develop their epistemological stance. One participant felt that they learned from exposure and that their practice developed from that and by doing what they felt comfortable with.

> *I suppose you learn by your exposure I suppose and you learn what's out there and what different approaches you can take and also I think, probably, that's partly based on your, what you feel comfortable doing, your experiences before.* (FG2-19, EP3)

5.4.3 Personal characteristics.

Personal experiences shape practice and manifest in individual differences. The themes of identity and integrity seem to capture how the EP navigates their way through the complexity of the work.

5.4.3.1 Identity-this is who I am and what I like/do.

The personal nature of the decisions made in practice was emphasised, and that **personal preferences** were based on previous approaches and interventions that are liked and have been useful, "*I think that's just being honest that some my decisions are based on prior experiences or personal idiosyncrasies".* (FG1-21, EP1). The notion of individual differences in EBP resonated with both focus groups.

> *I imagine there's a massive variation between how much people kind of look at lots of papers, and lots of kind of evidence and how much people go on their gut and their experience.* (FG2-18, EP3)

Therefore, a practitioner's characteristics, culture and preferences are key in enacting EBP.

> *You get EPs that definitely pick to do cognitive assessments all the time because that's their preference, their expertise and then others who do a more mixed model and others who will do loads of consultations and no cognitive assessments. So there's definitely a context of what people are comfortable, or their preference is.* (FG2-18, EP3)

These preferences may change over time and be influenced by current trends in practice.

> *I'm a serial enthusiast, and I have my little enthusiasm for a certain thing, and I find myself giving lots of advice about this thing, and then I go on to the next enthusiasm, and I start giving lots of advice around that.* (FG1-10, EP7)

Differences in the application of EBP was thought to be based on the EP's drivers for pursuing the vocation, such as wanting to work in a helping profession. It was considered that if values do not change as a result of training then perhaps different courses looked for trainees who reflected the values and ethos of their course.

> *Yeah and I think, thinking back to the interview yeah I can see how it was maybe something that different course providers are looking for, what type of EPs, or what are they looking for and I'm always quite interested in what, what it is they are looking for [*(FG2-19, EP3)- *that's a good point] and what, and how their biases and interests are shaping..* (FG2-20, TEP)

Values could be seen to be reflected in the identity of being a scientist-practitioner or a reflective practitioner varied across the groups. Both models were felt to be useful in shaping **what sort of practitioner** they were: "*I think there's an element for me of scientific and reflective practice, and it's a blending of the two for me rather than seeing them as two competing models"* (FG1-10, EP7). The flexibility of being able to ascribe to them both, or not, was valued, "*I've never, sort of, consciously described myself as a scientist and I suppose…if I was to use a model, and I wouldn't consciously use a model either, I'm a reflective practitioner"* (FG1-4, SEP13).

5.4.3.2 Integrity- I value what I know I know and don't know.

Integrity as a theme seemed to provide an all-encompassing meaning for values and epistemology. **Epistemological assumptions** were felt to be inherent in the definition of EBP.

> *It's interesting isn't it, EBP in psychology is the integration of the best available research so there might be a presumption when I read that that we all read research diligently and that it's all, that we're all in the same, way of, hierarchy.. that we all have the same understanding of what best research might be for certain situations.* (FG1-21, EP1)

EPs may not have the same understanding of what the best research may be, although it was made clear that research evidence was not fixed and could be refuted or developed further with new research, which highlights a need to stay up to date with research findings in key areas.

> *That was an example where those facts cease to be facts a couple of years later. A wider study was done, and different questions were asked, and that changed the advice I was giving with my children in care hat on so that just highlights the fragility of evidence. It's always changing; it's not a sort of fixed thing, it's a constructed thing.* (FG1-10, EP7)

Reflective practice was complementary to scientific practice in helping to make sense of evidence, and what it means, and to deal with issues of epistemology.

> *Getting to a point through reflective practice where you can be more clear about your own ontology and therefore your epistemology and then your methodology and then having them all lined up so that your practice has integrity.* (FG1-10, EP7)

It was argued that justifying practice decisions can be achieved by having a sound sense of philosophical assumptions. The fluidity of the concept **artist-scientist** reflected the discussions of epistemology and practice models. “The science of art and art of science” was suggested as “in really complex systems there has to be an element of artistry” (FG1-10, EP7), and this was why decisions made may differ, and there was no uniformity in approach.

Having a **values** base for practice was an important factor in the integrity of work carried out.

> *Experience for me commonly in casework would be to sort of to remind myself to step back from all this information and sort of think what questions, what helps, what most pertinent questions are arising, based on a set of values and then what evidence would I need to answer that question. I'll often start, I'll nearly always ask practitioners, people I work with, what's the question I'm looking for an answer to?* (FG1-10, EP7)

5.5 Discussion

Through a framework approach, I identified three main themes regarding the influence of EBP on how EPs make decisions in practice.

1. Contextual factors as a main theme serve as a domain summary of the themes: relationships, expectations and narrating complexity.
2. Influences of training and practice experience serve as a domain summary for themes: practice-based evidence, research to support and rationalise, developing skills and understanding.
3. Personal characteristics serve as a domain summary of the themes: identity and integrity.

The implications of these themes for practice shall now be considered. How the distinct main themes, themes and concepts interrelate and overlap will be discussed in relation to the literature reviewed, under the following coordinating headings: philosophical assumptions, applied psychology practice, and developing the EP. An additional discussion on outputs and outcomes, which I felt did not relate directly to the research question is in Appendix K.

5.5.1 Philosophical assumptions

EBP "is an approach used in numerous professions which focuses attention on evidence quality in decision making and action" (Rousseau & Gunia, 2016, p. 667). There is an assumption in this quotation that what is considered quality in evidence has a shared understanding. The literature review identified that some psychologists might refer to the hierarchy of evidence to appraise evidence, which privileges a positivist epistemology (Berke et al., 2011). This epistemological stance is concerned with concepts such as objectivity, reliability, validity and generalisability. The importance of relationships seems to reject these positivist notions in casework as EPs 'aren't thinking about generalisability' in practice. Importance was given to the attention of the unique context and characteristics of the client, and that was considered to be the 'gold standard' for their work. This importance was related to the privileging of relationships in practice and a focus on the individual within their social environment, which Kelly (2008) suggests implies an epistemological shift for EBP applied outside of the clinical setting to social constructionism. The importance of relationships is also in line with Fox's (2003, 2011) argument that the research hierarchy is not appropriate in educational psychology and provides empirical support for his claims.

Fox (2002) identified that the public expects EPs to make judgements based on objective criteria and society has an expectation that EPs do not 'individually construct judgements'. However, the data indicated that objectivity was not a concern to clients if the work carried out was in line with what the client wants. However, the original assertion that the public expects objective decisions maintains the perception that objectivity, and therefore, traditional positivist criteria are seen as more robust and superior. It is this perception that puts EPs in the 'problematic position' of taking a positivist view if the constructional view

of professional reasoning is challenged (Fox, 2003). This stance on epistemology reflects themes of ‘research to support and rationalise’ and ‘narrating complexity’, which links the main themes of ‘contextual factors’ and ‘influences of training and practice experience’. Together these themes represent this notion of using EBP to present something in a certain way to rationalise action. EBP thought of in this way implies that research evidence is EBP and that EPs may acquiesce with what others may think is the best research evidence.

What was often tricky in maintaining relationships was managing expectations, particularly around the cost and perceived benefits of the service provided, which is something that Gibbs and Papps (2017) highlighted as being relevant in traded models of service delivery. There was a sense that participants feel under pressure as they are feel they are being ‘paid for an answer’. Part of this pressure seems to come from being expected to ‘know the answer’.

Knowing was a concept in the theme: ’developing skills and understanding’ and highlighted EPs’ conception of EBP as an approach where they have reference to knowledge which they can impart at will, implying that it is possible to know the ‘right’ answer. For this reason, EBP was not a dominant factor in decision making as ‘not knowing’ was recognised as being valuable and central part of the EP role. This implies that EPs concur with Biesta (2007) and Clegg’s (2005) rejection of ‘technological practice’ in education. The association of EBP with the positivist assumption of knowledge as truth also provides a rationale for EBP not being the key driver in EP practice, as social constructionism is seen as the dominant epistemology in educational psychology practice (Kelly, 2008).

EPs may use different lenses to view a situation. These lenses and the spectrum of skills employed may imply different philosophical assumptions such as assessment methods in individual casework and systemic work in schools and systems. It could be argued that the relational aspects of the role align more with a social constructionist perspective. This perspective could be the rationale for resistance to EBP as a misconceived concept. EBP is used as a narrative to negotiate and tailor provision for the child to meet their needs and the expectations of those contextual factors around the child. Themes of

'narrating complexity', 'integrity' and 'skills' are linked for understanding how EPs can navigate and situate themselves within conflicting paradigms that Moore (2005) argues informs professional practice. Moore (2005) highlights an ethical need to explore these epistemological and ontological positions. Though perhaps philosophical considerations are far removed from the realities of day to day EP practice, and so 'flipping' between different methodological camps is not as concerning as Fox argues if "the EP flip" (Fox, 2003, p.100) meets the purpose of an ethically sound intention.

5.5.3 Applied psychology practice

The literature review identified that professional practice frameworks have been advocated to address the challenge of applying theory to complex practice methodology in educational contexts (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). As such, practice frameworks can support the complexity of decision-making as they have a function of breaking down a complex problem and making it more manageable through a systematic approach. EBP as a process can also help manage the decision-making process systematically. The findings show that EBP is thought of differently as a product and process. As a product, it is not a dominant factor in decision-making, and it is rarely considered as a process and a model for practice. This supports what Pagoto et al., (2007) found about the misconceptions and the confusion of EBP as a process and product, i.e. empirically supported treatments (EST), which in education is evidence-based interventions (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2004). Therefore, this research in line with the implications of Pagoto et al., (2007) and Wilson et al.'s (2009) research studies, suggesting it is necessary to correct misconceptions about what EBP is (and what it is not) to improve practitioner understanding and subsequently its implementation.

The theme of relationships showed that EBP was thought of as secondary to relationships and again shows the dominance of it being thought of as only research-based evidence. "The integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (APA, 2006, p. 273) is not in EPs' schema of what EBP is. The APA (2006) definition of EBP is not conflicting with the holistic approach to psychology practice that is advocated, and indeed it places great importance on

the experience and expertise of the practitioner. It is not a case of research being prioritised over experience but integrated with it.

EBP as a process was seen to be present within the concept of 'funnelling', where research is searched to find out about a condition and then considered in light of previous experience and narrowed to apply to the context and the child. It is noted that this approach applied in an educational context is most similar to the medical context. In this context, an approach requires an answerable question, which is often difficult to ascertain in EP work. The five-step model of EBP as presented by Dawes et al. (2005) recognises uncertainty in practice and asserts to recognise and admit uncertainties is a crucial part of what leads to use of the five-step model. They add that a psychological framework of reflective learning is part of how evidence is appraised and applied and is a key part of the EBP process (Dawes et al. 2005).

5.5.4 Developing the EP

EBP is seen as something separate to the reflective practitioner and scientist-practitioner roles. These roles were more easily seen as relating to the EP. Professional practice is complex, unpredictable and messy and regarding having a better psychological understanding, the reflective practitioner model was considered a tool for a better understanding of self and the scientist-practitioner model as a tool for a better understanding of processes. Again, the perception of EBP as a product seems to be linked to its limited usefulness in decision-making. However, if thought of as a process, it could be a way of linking scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models. The scientist-practitioner model envisions psychologists who utilise critical, scientific thinking skills and the reflective practitioner model is associated with learning from experience. Thus, reflecting two of the four sources of information "a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence", and, "practitioner expertise and judgement", from the EBP definition proposed by Briner and Rousseau (2011a, p.19).

A driver for becoming an EP was named as an interest in people and working in a helping profession. Therefore, values rather than epistemology may be more important for some EPs. The perceived importance of values is in line with the

findings from Burnham's (2013) study, which highlighted the participants' perceived importance of personal attributes, values and beliefs to their role as an EP.

Also related to the dominance of EBP being thought of as just research-based evidence, is that it is thought of as a way of supporting a more novice practitioner, indicating that EBP is thought of as mechanical or 'technological' practice. Therefore, it came across that EBP was something that became less necessary as the EP progressed and developed the tacit knowledge of more expert practice (Schön, 1983).

5.5.5 Summary

Findings show that the practice decisions of these EPs were influenced by EBP according to contextual factors, training and practice experiences and personal characteristics, which, as patterns of meaning have implications for developing the EP, the philosophical assumptions underpinning their applied psychology practice, and associated outputs and outcomes (Appendix K).

In addressing the research question, "How are the ways in which EPs make decisions in practice influenced by EBP?", the findings describe the meaning that EBP has for decision-making. A dominant theme was that EBP is a highly contextual concept, and what is classed as 'evidence' will vary with contextual factors, including the local context, desired outcomes for the child, and the relationships with clients. This contextual variability was coupled with a sense that EBP is mediated by the influences of the professional training and practice experiences and most of all by personal values. This creates a dynamic tension for developing EBP, as its understanding is grounded on personal, internalised beliefs while being contextualised by the demands of specific circumstances.

The main findings were that in relation to decision-making EBP is thought of as:

- not a dominant factor in decision-making.
- a way to bring credibility to an EP's decisions and beliefs.
- doing what is expected or 'the right thing'.
- about supporting those with less-knowledge.

- associated with what others may deem is best evidence.
- associated with research evidence and is therefore associated with positivist notions of knowledge. EPs reject positivist notions as a result of the value they place on relationships and constructing meaning. Therefore, EBP is not fully embraced as an overarching framework for practice.
- thought of differently as a product and process.
- rarely considered as a process and a model for practice. It was seen to be present within the concept of ‘funnelling’ when practice is akin to a medical context.
- having limited relevance as applied EP work is not all about recommending evidence-based interventions.

6. Discussion

The literature emphasised the need for a clearer understanding of EBP in educational psychology and highlighted the need to inquire if the definition of EBP captures what is necessary for decision-making in educational psychology practice. Overall the research has added to this knowledge, as it has explored perceptions of EBP with EPs, and it has explored participants' understanding and interpretation of EBP in relation to decision-making in practice.

The topic of this research is situated as being part of the wider cultural landscape where EBP is explicitly linked to accountability (Allen & Burgess, 2010; Dunsmuir et al., 2009; Hammersley, 2001) and accordingly trust. The findings of this study show that participants were consciously aware of this incentive for EBP in phase two. Additionally, in phase one, 'trust' featured as a dimension of variation on how EBP is experienced showing the nuanced way that trust is engendered as a function of EBP depending on the duty of the EP at a particular time.

Conceptualisations of EBP are influenced by environmental factors both internal and external to the EP, shown by the balance of professional duties with the demands placed upon them. Therefore, the phenomenographic results of phase one could be used for competence development, as by using the variation of how professionals understand the studied phenomenon, new ways of understanding open up the possibility of working in new ways (Sandberg, 2005). The variation showed that EPs have an adaptive approach to EBP in order to maintain their 'professionality'. Knowing when to enact a particular situational approach as determined by the features of the context could prove to be a useful aspect of competence development. A situational approach to EBP could be developed in conjunction with the use of ideological, theoretical and practice frameworks for understanding and carrying out psychological work (Kelly, 2008), including 'situational analysis' as a framework for professional practice and research in educational psychology (Annan, 2005).

Research exploring practitioner psychologists understanding of EBP has reported that psychologists have a more positive perception of EBP when they

have a better understanding of the definition (Wilson et al, 2009). In addition, empirical findings from past studies have suggested that EBP is often synonymous with research evidence and/or empirically supported products (Berke et al., 2011; Luebbe et al., 2007). As Nieber et al. (2000) contend, understandings of EBP are influenced by its perceived alliance with positivism and ergo hierarchies of evidence. For EPs in this research this association was also found and EBP in educational psychology was criticised by participants for this supposed alliance, which is in line with the criticisms of EBP put forward by Moore (2005) and Fox (2002).

The origin of EBP in the field of medicine places attention to evidence quality in decision making on the generalisability of the results of applicable research (Guyatt, 1991). The misconception is then that the same standards of evidence quality need to apply in educational psychology. The standards for evidence in educational psychology practice and evidence in educational psychology research may not necessarily be the same. The different understandings of EBP in phase one show that EPs can be adaptive in evidence-use.

The research has identified dual perspectives on EBP. In phase one EBP can be considered as a holistic concept, where the different dimensions of EBP vary according to function. In phase two EBP was strongly associated with research evidence. Fox (2011) has provided an explanation for these differences in perception through the concept of EBP being a ‘hot topic’, which is where there is a natural resistance to changing deeply held beliefs. This study shows that a schema for EBP is research evidence, which is likely to have been developed through the synonymous use of the terms evidence and research. Therefore, the findings from this research support Fox’s (2011) argument that it is necessary to have the skills to acknowledge cognitive biases and to evaluate different theoretical perspectives. Indeed, a theme in phase two of ‘psychological understanding’ was related to conceptions of the complexity of both decision-making and EBP and an expressed need for having a better psychological understanding of these things and of themselves as an instrument in the process. Participants thus recognised understanding cognitive processes in decision-making as an important area of skill development.

It was recognised by particpants that there were individual differences in EPs as practitioners in phase two and this is shown by the variation of conceptualisations in phase one. A possible explanation of these differences is the EPs' philosophical assumptions. EPs come into training from a social science or science-based psychology background, which will have shaped their understanding of psychology and how knowledge is generated and used within the field. However, what may be a skill of a psychologist is recognising that EBP has associations for others too and what they may deem best evidence, which is negotiated with their own view of what is best evidence; shown in phase two. Again, this is supported by the adaptive use of the EBP in phase one.

This research supports the findings of Burnham (2013) that there is a blurred boundary between the personal and the professional in that personal attributes, values and beliefs (developed prior to professional training) are a core part of an EP's identity, integrity and practice. The relevance of Burnham's research has been questioned since the doctoral level training programmes had not been established at the time of his study. However, this research shows that the personal values and beliefs are still a core part of an EP's identity, integrity and practice, regardless of doctoral level training. This has important implications for educational training and the recruitment of trainee EPs as certain pre-training experiences, and personal values and attributes may need to be an essential part of the person specification for a TEP.

Professional practice frameworks are used by EPs to support them with the challenge of applying psychological theory to complex practice methodology in educational contexts (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008). However, these frameworks do not provide a psychological understanding of the process in itself. What Fox (2003) has argued about EPs needing artistry in their professional practice is borne out in this research as the how an EP adapts their EBP seemed to be in the form of the narratives constructed to fit the context. An in-depth in understanding of the practice models prescribed by the HCPC, namely the scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models and the cognitive biases (Thompson, 2003; Fox, 2011) that the models help to overcome will provide EPs with a greater understanding of the full meaning and implementation of EBP.

EBP could be a way of linking of scientist-practitioner, and reflective practitioner models. The scientist-practitioner model envisions psychologists who utilise critical, scientific thinking skills and the reflective practitioner model is associated with learning from experience. Thus reflecting two of the four sources of information “a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence”, and. “practitioner expertise and judgement”, from the EBP definition proposed by Briner and Rousseau (2011a, p.19). The other sources of information “evidence from the local context” and the “perspectives of people who might be affected by the decision”. (Briner & Rousseau, 2011a, p.19) are what is considered from an ecological perspective (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, it would seem that EPs have the tools in their toolkit to have an explicit evidence-based approach to practice and importance of professional learning. The implication of this research is that work needs to be done to change the schema of EBP as research-based practice. This is key to aligning current schema with what was evidenced in the conceptualisations of EBP in phase one: different levels of EBP reflecting a different ecological perspective.

The APA (2006) definition of EBP does not conflict with the holistic approach to psychology practice that is advocated, and indeed it places great importance on the experience and expertise of the practitioner. It is not a case of research being prioritised over experience but integrated with it. Therefore it is necessary to correct misconceptions about what EBP is (and what it is not) to improve practitioner understandings of EBP and subsequently its implementation.

The discussion around the different current definitions of EBP in phase two (presented as an addendum in Appendix J) showed that there were different considerations in terms of evidence quality in decision making and action, which was substantiated by the findings in phase one and phase two. Therefore, the following may be a more suitable definition in educational psychology to reflect the outputs of this research:

> *Evidence-based practice in educational psychology is the integration of the critically appraised relevant research with reflexive practice,*

considered conjointly with both practitioner and client characteristics, culture, and preferences, in an ecosystemic context.

I have created this definition based on what the research has shown about EPs conceptualisations of EBP and its influence on decision making. Therefore, this definition is a convergence of the research objectives stated in Chapter 3 and offers an interpretation to the research problem outlined in Chapter 1. This definition reflects the findings of phase one that EBP is seen from an ecological perspective and it reflects the findings of phase two that knowing the self as an EP was important in decision-making. An ecosystemic perspective supports EPs to create a multi-layered understanding of a problem situation (Cameron, 2006). Therefore, the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of information is facilitated by increasing awareness of, and sensitivity to, the self and to social, economic, and cultural contexts.

7. Conclusion

This study concludes with a summary of the research in 7.1 and considers with the strengths and limitations of this research in Section 7.2. Practical implications for EPs are in Section 7.3. Future directions for research are explored in Section 7.4, followed by a final point of reflection in Section 7.5 and concluding comments in Section 7.6.

7.1 Conclusion

This research was formed of two linked phases, both involving EPs. Phase one explored the variation in the ways that EPs understood and experienced EBP in educational psychology through interviews and phenomenographic analysis. Phase two explored the influence of EBP in EPs' decision-making in practice, through focus groups with participants from phase one and a framework approach to thematic analysis.

The research carried out in phase one showed that it was possible to distinguish four different understandings of EBP among EPs, each focused on a different perception of duty: professional responsibilities, child and solution-focused outcomes, providing a service and upholding the reputation of the profession, and fulfilling a moral obligation. These foci were identified from how participants talked about their practice, which showed variation in perceptions of the rationale for EBP, the use of knowledge in EBP, how trust is achieved and the application of evidence. The findings provide a more nuanced understanding of how EBP is thought about, in that EBP in educational psychology is contextual and serves a function dependent on the situation and the primary duty of the EP at that time, which further suggests that how an EP conceptualises EBP is ecological in perspective.

The research carried out in phase two extends the research carried out in phase one and showed that practice decisions of EPs are influenced by EBP according to contextual factors, training and practice experiences and personal characteristics. The findings from phase two support the findings in phase one by reinforcing that the understanding of EBP is grounded on personal,

internalised beliefs while being contextualised by the demands of specific circumstances.

In the Section 1.2.1 I outlined that the research topic was inspired by a transformed meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, the usefulness of this research comes in the assertion that there is a need to continue to develop an understanding of the epistemological and moral frameworks through which EBP has been conceived and consequently conceptualised. This is to develop a perspective transformation of EBP in educational psychology through a critical reappraisal of previous assumptions and presuppositions. EBP is required to fit different purposes and perspectives, and therefore clarity is needed about what it is intended for and how it may be used in the future, however, without being too rigid, fixed or prescriptive.

7.2 Strengths and limitations of the current research

In this section I will reflect on some of the main strengths and limitations of the research.

7.2.1 Strengths

The primary strength of this research is the participants that have contributed their time and thoughtful insights into their practice. The sample did not include participants from all the fourteen UK training providers, however, over half were represented. The range of experience as an EP in the sample was a strength and afforded insight into different ways of understanding EBP, which through this qualitative inquiry has been explored as part of a dialogic and iterative process. Rich accounts from the data have been provided to assist the reader in judging the relevance of my findings. The cooperative nature of the focus groups was also a strength in illuminating how EBP influences decision-making. Therefore, the reflective and critical thinking offered to the study by the participants is crucial to its success and original contribution to knowledge.

7.2.1.1 Contribution to methodology

To my knowledge, this research topic has not previously been analysed in a phenomenographic manner. This novel methodological approach adds a new perspective to the qualitative analysis of the data by focusing on the critical

variance in perceptions, which generated new insights into EBP. These insights can be used for developing a critical and reflexive form of teaching and instilling EBP.

7.2.1.2 Contribution to educational psychology

The findings show that what is important for EBP in educational psychology is for it to have a values base and a social constructionist reworking, so that EPs can take ownership of what EBP means to them. Therefore, an integrated definition of EBP is required to reflect the integrated practice of EPs and a suggestion has been put forward:

> *Evidence-based practice in educational psychology is the integration of the critically appraised relevant research with reflexive practice, considered conjointly with both practitioner and client characteristics, culture, and preferences, in an ecosystemic context.*

7.2.2 Limitations

This research study deliberately focuses on a broad subject area as previous research in this area has been based on researcher assumptions of EBP. Therefore, it was important for the scope and meaning of EBP to be developed from the participants own conceptualisations. However, the impact of broad research questions was some limitations on the depth and complexity of the themes and the analysis, due to the constraints of the research project such as being a sole researcher and time and word limits.

The mass of data collected in phase one was rich and plentiful as an in-depth interview was undertaken rather than a typical phenomenographic interview. The phenomenographic analysis was a useful tool to make sense of the complexity and identify an account of the variation in ways that EPs understood and experienced EBP. However, its focus on the collective removes the individual voice and there was lots of detail in the interviews that did not make the analysis, such as examining the answers to the question about their worldview. In this regard, a pluralistic qualitative research design may have allowed for a more multi-layered understanding of the phenomenon of EBP. A pluralistic research approach to this study would mean applying different

qualitative methods of analysis to the same data set, affording another perspective on what was shared during the interviews (Frost et al., 2011). Narratives was a theme of EBP and using narrative analysis with the interview data could have illuminated this theme further by exploring the stories constructed by the participant to provide insight into how their professional identity is constructed (Reissman, 2008), which may have added greater depth to understanding EPs' conceptualisations of EBP.

EBP is a "highly complex phenomenon referred to by three terms (evidence, based, and practice), which themselves can be defined and understood in different ways" (Kvernbekk, 2016, p.4). In the literature review scant attention is paid to the philosophical or psychological underpinnings of EBP. I included a brief discussion of the skills in decision-making and some consideration of philosophical assumptions. However, a more in-depth exposition of these topics would provide a more comprehensive account of EBP and the terms by which it is referred to.

7.3 Implications for Practice

In an era of 'evidence-based everything' it is important to agree on what it is that the profession is striving for. This study aimed to determine the different ways in which EPs understand EBP and how EBP influences the decision-making process. The variation in understanding and approaches to decision-making showed a dual perspective of EBP, which emphasises the complexity and flexibility of the construct. There is a political and legislative impetus for EBP, which includes the requirement of EPs to be engaging in EBP by the HCPC (2015) and a focus on evidence in the SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). However, there is a lack of clarity about what EBP is and consequently what engaging in it looks like. This is important to clarify because EBP is linked to notions of trust and accountability and the opportunity is there for EPs to demonstrate their trustworthiness and how best it is to evaluate their work, rather than rely on legislation to dictate the direction EPs' practice should take (Maliphant, 1997). Therefore, an important implication of this research is that EBP is taken forward by the profession to shape what the construct means for it.

As differing conceptualisations of EBP seem to fulfil different functions of duty under different circumstances it will be important for EPs to reflect on the ways in which they can incorporate the model of EBP into their practice. In turn, EP services could consider how their service could be restructured to support an EBP approach, and what this means for them. This could include EP service managers considering how the structures within their service could support those EPs who are seeking to extend their role to include applied research and other methods of sharing good practice and practice-based evidence.

Recognising the value of different perspectives, including epistemological and empirical influences on understanding has been shown to be important. Therefore, training providers could consider the skills and understanding necessary for EBP, including research appraisal, critical thinking, and reflexivity. Accordingly, EBP within the TEP course curriculum, could include the wider implications of EBP implementation and TEPs should be encouraged to consider what is expected of engaging with EBP as stipulated by the HCPC (2015) and endorsed by the BPS (2015).

I would recommend open discussion among stakeholders to address the complexities of EBP and promote a commitment to nurturing critical engagement with this practice. A collaborative approach ensuring all stakeholders have a voice, led by the BPS or the AEP, should lead to stakeholders developing an integrated programme to ensure EBP is fostered, developed and maintained to fulfil a definition and model of EBP for educational psychology. This would be a positive contribution to addressing the concerns of the profession and would be a proactive step towards ensuring the values of EPs and high professional standards are cohesive.

This could be achieved by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) commissioning research and a consultation process with a range of stakeholders to produce a definition of EBP that reflects the British educational and child psychology context and has due regard to the requirements from the HCPC. This could include guidance and clarification of the skills and competencies necessary for successful EBP.

7.4 Directions for Future Research

As suggested as an implication for practice providing guidance and clarification of EBP would be desirable. The development of a conceptual framework of EBP in educational psychology could be a next step for this research, which could include guidance on appraising evidence in an educational psychology context. Such a framework could provide practitioners with greater clarity of EBP in educational psychology and could include an agreed definition of EBP in educational psychology. This was a consideration for this thesis but the scope of the project would have been too large to undertake. I had thought about using the Delphi method (see Clayton, 1997) to gain a consensus on what a definition of EBP could be in educational psychology. The Delphi method seeks to gain opinions on a given question from a range of experts. Experts are defined as individuals involved in the critique, conception, design, conduct, teaching or analysis of EBP in educational psychology.

There could be an opportunity for this to be undertaken as a piece of research with stakeholders including course directors and EPs who have contributed to the literature on this topic, as well as practicum supervisors. This is a feasible project as this technique was used recently by Atkinson, Dunsmuir, Lang and Wright (2015) to define competencies in the professional educational psychology curriculum for training EPs to work with 16-25-year olds.

7.5 Reflexivity

As a qualitative methodology was adopted for this research, reflexivity was central to ensure awareness of my role in the construction of meaning. In this final point of reflection on the overall process of conducting this research, I would describe my journey through this research process as a daunting, thought-provoking and affirming. Immersing myself in qualitative research was a big undertaking and both academically and personally, very challenging. Maintaining epistemological and methodological congruence has been a huge learning curve.

I approached this research with a great deal of naivety and without a full comprehension of the task at hand. In both phases of the research, there were moments during data analysis where I felt overcome by the task of examining the data and I lacked confidence. This feeling grew during the interpretation stages where making sense of the fragmented concepts bringing them together into a coherent form was overwhelming. To manage the feeling of overwhelm I tracked the ways in which the data progressed in analysis from initial assumptions, to new positions or perceptions in my field notes. I also chose to use extensive quotations in reporting to reflect the voices of the participants. The necessity of being iterative and returning time and time again to the data was unexpected to some extent, as was the need for an intuitive leap to gain insight. There was an assumption that it would be a more linear process. However, I have learnt the value of this cyclic approach to research and the insight and knowledge it can generate. I have also learnt to believe in myself and to trust in the integrity of my interpretation, which led to the knowledge that has been generated in this thesis.

7.6 Concluding comments

This has been a challenging piece of research and I am pleased to have contributed to what is known about EPs' understanding and experiences of EBP. In this research I have sought to map out how EPs conceptualise EBP and understand its meaning in decision-making. How EBP has been defined and mapped out says as much about my perspective as the construct I have sought to describe. Inevitably my own position as a TEP, from a particular training programme, with my background experiences, will bring with it a particular perspective. This has shaped the research and the resulting findings that have been generated from the interviews and focus groups.

This has not been an objective account but my version of what EBP is and could mean for EPs. EBP, as presented, may not be immediately recognisable to some people based on them considering it from their own perspective, which could be different to mine. In trying to conceptualise EBP in educational psychology, the purpose has not been to suppress diversity but to clarify and

contribute to a discussion that leads to greater understanding and better practice.

The research has contributed to current knowledge within the field of educational psychology and provides a more nuanced understanding of what EBP is considered to be. An outcome of the research is the proposal of a tentative definition of EBP that reflects the conceptualisations of EPs. A useful future research direction has been proposed to extend this exploratory research project.

Finally, the research process has developed my understanding of philosophical as well as psychological concepts. It has deepened my understanding of EBP and its inherent complexities in applying it to educational psychology practice to ensure quality in decision-making without stifling the creative and innovative use of psychology.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethical Approval

UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

Researcher(s) name: Ruth Arnell

Supervisor(s): Shirley Larkin
Tim Maxwell

This project has been approved for the period

From: 09/06/2017
To: 27/07/2018

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/16/17/48

Signature: Date: 09/06/2017
(Dr Philip Durrant, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix B – Information Sheet and Consent Form, Phase One

Information Sheet and Consent Form for Research

Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

You are invited to take part in a research project about the evidence-based practice of Educational Psychologists.

Evidence-based practice in psychology

Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) has been established by the American Psychological Association (APA). They state: "Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (APA, 2006, p. 273). They also state that "The purpose of EBPP is to promote effective psychological practice and enhance public health by applying empirically supported principles of psychological assessment, case formulation, therapeutic relationship, and intervention" (APA, 2006, p. 273).

But what about evidence-based practice in Educational Psychology?

How does the above definition fit in with Educational Psychology practice? What does evidence-based practice in Educational Psychology mean? How is practitioner expertise fostered and blended with an empirical evidence base to make decisions about practice?

Aim of the project

What do you think? This study will explore how Educational Psychologists select 'evidence' and use their expertise in applying evidence-based practice. Participants will be invited to share their views and values regarding their professional practice.

The data gathered will be analysed thematically and presented in a doctoral thesis. The results of the research may also be disseminated through conferences, reports, and potentially academic journals.

Participation

Research participants will be asked to meet with me and answer some questions about their usual working practices and their values and beliefs. I would then like to explore their

experiences and views of evidence-based practice. This semi-structured interview will last approximately 1 hour and will take place in summer 2017.

During the interview participants, can change answers or refrain from answering any questions.

After the interview participants, may review, amend or withdraw their transcripts should they wish to. There will also be an opportunity to have a debrief session to discuss any issues which may have caused distress, and also to reflect on the procedure and interview schedule.

All sessions with participants will be digitally recorded so that I have a record of what was said. The audio recording will be listened to and typed into a written transcription. Digital audio recordings will only be kept for transcription purposes then deleted. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout and all data will be anonymised. The preservation of anonymity both of participants and their Service is of the utmost importance.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis. I will ensure that no participant or Service will be identifiable from any of the demographic data collected. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form. All participants will have the right to remove their data. All raw data will be kept confidential. All data will be stored and password protected. Data will be kept for a maximum of five years then destroyed.

Contact Details

For further information about the research, please contact:

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Consent Form for Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

Consent
Part 1: Semi-structured Interview

I give consent to my participation in part 1 of the research project: '**Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology**', which involves taking part in a **semi-structured interview** about evidence-based practice.

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage.

- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.

- Any information that I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations.

- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project.

- All information I give will be treated as confidential.

- The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

…… ……

(Signature of participant) (Printed name of participant)

…… ……

(Signature of researcher) (Printed name of researcher)

……

(Date)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

Appendix C – Information Sheet and Consent Form, Phase Two

Information Sheet and Consent Form for Research

Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

You are invited to take part in a research project about the evidence-based practice of Educational Psychologists.

Evidence-based practice in psychology

Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) has been established by the American Psychological Association (APA). They state: "Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (APA, 2006, p. 273). They also state that "The purpose of EBPP is to promote effective psychological practice and enhance public health by applying empirically supported principles of psychological assessment, case formulation, therapeutic relationship, and intervention" (APA, 2006, p. 273).

But what about evidence-based practice in Educational Psychology?

How does the above definition fit in with Educational Psychology practice? What does evidence-based practice in Educational Psychology mean? How is practitioner expertise fostered and blended with an empirical evidence base to make decisions about practice?

Aim of the project

What do you think? This study will explore how Educational Psychologists select 'evidence' and use their expertise in applying evidence-based practice. Participants will be invited to share their views and values regarding their professional practice.

The data gathered will be analysed thematically and presented in a doctoral thesis. The results of the research may also be disseminated through conferences, reports, and potentially academic journals.

Participation

Research participants will be asked to take part in a focus group to discuss the themes generated from part 1 interview data. This session will last approximately 1 hour and will take place in autumn 2017.

Ground rules for the focus group will be devised by the participants at the start of the session and adhered to during the focus group discussion. Views collected in the focus group will not be attributed to individuals but reported collectively in a research paper within which it will not be possible to identify EP Services nor any individuals.

At the end of the session I will check back with the participants that their views have been understood and noted accurately on any outputs created during the focus group.

I will be available during and following these discussions should anyone wish to discuss any issues. A follow up call in the week following the focus group will give participants an opportunity to discuss any issues that may have arisen.

All sessions with participants will be digitally recorded so that I have a record of what was said. The audio recording will be listened to and typed into a written transcription. Digital audio recordings will only be kept for transcription purposes then deleted. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout and all data will be anonymised. The preservation of anonymity both of participants and their Service is of the utmost importance.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis. I will ensure that no participant or Service will be identifiable from any of the demographic data collected. They will not be used other than for the purposes described above and third parties will not be allowed access to them (except as may be required by the law). Your data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Data Protection Notice

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form. All participants will have the right to remove their data. All raw data will be kept confidential. All data will be stored and password protected. Data will be kept for a maximum of five years then destroyed.

Contact Details

For further information about the research, please contact:

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Consent Form for Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology

Consent
Part 2: Focus Group Attendance

I give consent to my participation in part 2 of the research project: **'Conceptualising Evidence-Based Practice in Educational Psychology**', which participating in a focus group to generate guidelines around evidence-based practice in educational psychology.

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage.
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.
- Any information that I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations.
- If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project.
- All information I give will be treated as confidential.
- The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

…… ……

(Signature of participant) (Printed name of participant)

…… ……

(Signature of researcher) (Printed name of researcher)

……

(Date)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s).

Your contact details are kept separately from focus group data.

Appendix D – Interview Schedule

Area		Main question	Prompts / follow up
Job Role	**1**	Where do you work and what is your role?	Main grade / Type of practice
	2	Do you have any specialist areas of interest? Why/How have these become your specialisms?	Favourite topics
	3	Do you sit on any panels?	SEND
	4	Do you deliver any training?	
	5 **6**	How did you develop the training materials?	
	7	Do you supervise anyone?	TEPs / Line manage
	8	How often do you have supervision?	
	9	What psychological approaches to supervision do you use?	Are they different depending on context? E.g. Solution Focused
	10	Do you record your reflections? What is the nature of your reflections?	What frameworks and processes do you use for reflection?
	11	Has a traded model of delivery changed your psychological practice?	
	12	What is the philosophy of the service?	
	13	How is CPD supported?	
Previous experience	**14**	Can you tell me about your career path?	How long have you been an EP for?
	15	*Do you think your own experience of education helped shape your practice as an EP?*	
	16	*Do you think any of your personal experiences outside of education have shaped your practice?*	What was your background? Have you been a teacher?
	17	When did you qualify? Where did you do your training?	
	18	Any EB approaches encouraged to use during training?	Has there been anything in your training that hasn't been covered? Knowledge of RCTS, meta-analysis, systematic review evidence
Evidence	**19**	What does EBP mean to you?	What is your knowledge/assumptions of EBP?
	20	How have you come to this understanding?	Any previous knowledge?
	21	What counts as evidence?	Attainment? Off report, less behaviour points, own school measures? How do you evidence change? Do you get evidence from seniors?
Casework	**22.**	Tell me about EBP when using casework? What are your processes for carrying out casework?	Models of casework, frameworks, consultation, dialogue, artwork Any use more frequently?

	23.	How has your practice changed since you have qualified?	
	24.	What methods of assessment do you favour?	How come to this methods? Cognitive biases / Attractiveness of quick fix / fads
	25	How do you know if something has worked?	How would you know if an intervention has been successful? What outcome measures do you use?
Literature	**26**	Where do you get your knowledge or evidence about what you're recommending?	Where do you go to get your answers? Do you keep updated?
	27	To what extent are you critical about what you are reading?	Do you rank different types of evidence?
	28	What do you consider to be the best research? Is this what's generally accepted as the best research?	Do you value quantitative or qualitative research? Rigour or relevance?
	29	How do you go about applying theory to practice?	Specialism group
	30	How often do you reference your work?	
Professional knowledge	**31**	Looking at the definition – (culture, client, expertise, research) *What do you think 'EBP' means? Is it a useful concept?* Does it apply to EP?	Why in general is EBP or something like it needed? What is the driver for using EBP?
Professional perspectives	**32**	How has your expertise developed?	How do you apply learning to new cases?
	33	*Are you objective in the work that you do?*	
	34	*What does 'research' mean in our profession?*	What about best available research?
	35	Does EBP give a clearer more reliable picture of the child or young person?	
Being an EP	**36**	What kind of practitioner are you? In what epistemological framework would you categorise your practice?	Scientific / reflective / constructionist etc
	37	*Where does being an EP fit into your life?*	*Are there links between your work and your life outside of work in terms of values, aspirations etc.?*
	38	What kind of professional do you want to be?	*To what extent, if at all, does your personality dictate the kind of psychologist you are?*
Key: Questions italicised and highlighted are taken from Burnham (2013).			

Appendix E – Reflexivity

E1 Ethical reflections

In both analysing and reporting the data I have been aware that I have an ethical duty to the participants in ensuring that their anonymity is secure. I am aware that I have been trusted with participants' information. In some interviews some sensitive information was shared and whilst some salient points were made I felt that this data could not be included as an excerpt as this may reveal the identity of the participant, particularly as this research may be read by colleagues. I feel conscious of being in a fairly small professional pool and I am aware of the possible impact of the research. This has hindered the process in many ways as I lacked confidence in making claims, despite it being grounded in data as I have had in my mind the participants reading what I have written.

This is especially the case because what I have chosen to do for the research was borne out of a desire to bring something useful to the profession. I am aware of the impact of my own interpretations affecting how I have decided on which themes are prevalent and the way in which I have reported them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although as a researcher, it is not possible to rule out all personal influences, the process of 'reflexivity' encouraged me to acknowledge my theoretical positions and values that relate to the research (Willig, 2010).

<u>Refinement of Research Question for Phase Two</u>

Qualitative research questions need to articulate what a researcher wants to know about the intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions and changes in questions emerge from examining the role and perspective of the researcher in the inquiry (Agee, 2009). The process of carrying out the data collection in phase one led me to further consider why I was interested in educational psychologists' conceptualisations of evidence-based practice. In subsequent reflections, I realized that I was interested in the factors that shaped their perceptions of evidence-based practice and how this influenced the way in which they made decisions in their practice. This linked back to how the evidence-based practice movement came to fruition, due to concerns about the quality of decision making in modern healthcare and so I felt that decision making was important to consider. My question for phase two then

became “How are the ways in which EPs make decisions in practice influenced by evidence-based practice?”

E2 Bracketing

Being aware of my own assumptions had allowed me to try to bracket them to reduce their influence on my work (Robson, 2002). Some of my assumptions came from my background in teaching and experiences as a trainee EP. There are also conflicting priorities affecting me as a researcher and a practitioner. Both my assumptions and my priorities have implications at each stage of the research process, from the interpretation of the literature reviewed, to my choice of methods and the conclusions drawn from the findings. Without being reflexive I do not believe I would have made the discoveries I have made. This has enabled me to reflect on my own position and recognise that the participants have their positions that is reflected in what they say and that I am interpreting this further. I recognise that in other circumstances someone else may make sense of the data differently or a different set of participants could generate different information.

To achieve bracketing I would ask follow up questions, in order to make sense of ideas that people would consider as ‘norms’: for example, during one interview a participant said he favoured precision teaching and before going to ask what its benefits were I asked him to describe what this was. This technique was helpful as it meant the participants could clarify terms of shared understanding. This illuminated what was salient about the term for the participant, e.g. an opportunity to collect evidence.

I found it a difficult challenge to put aside the influence of professional, as well as personal beliefs and assumptions, in order to give the most complete consideration to the conceptions expressed by participants; a fundamental phenomenographic procedure (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000). I identified some of my own assumptions about EBP and this is shown in Section 1.2.1. At the start this process EBP was about justifying what you were doing. At the end of the project, I can see that I too had a misconception of EBP, so common to many psychology practitioners in the literature. However, recognising that this was my perception did not mean it could not be others’ perceptions too. I was careful to

reduce the impact of my preconceived ideas by allowing the data to drive the presentation of my findings.

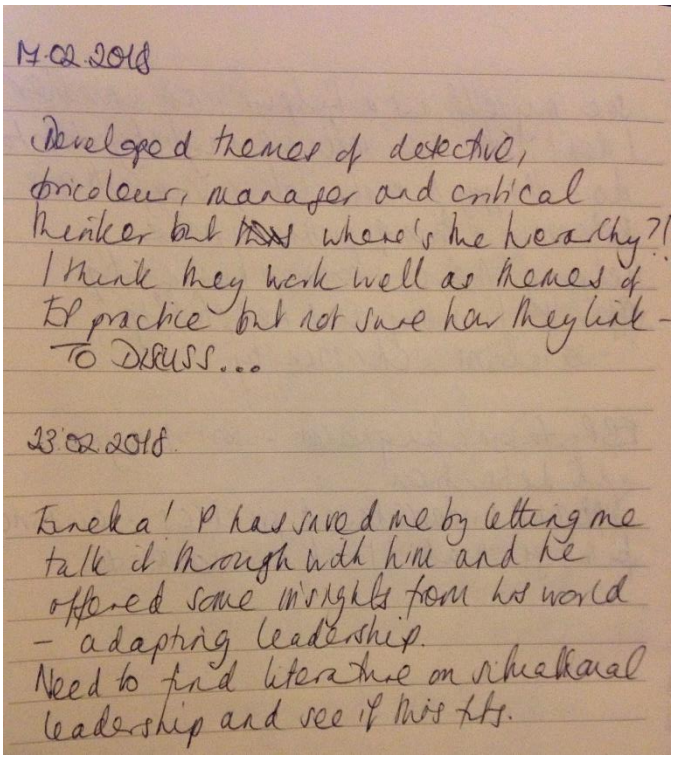
There have been some intuitive leaps, namely the metaphors chosen to label the categories of description in phase one. I found that through discussion with my supervisors that I was able to refine these. For example, my notion of what a critical thinker was brought up a different connotation in my supervisor, which led to a discussion about what I intended and the new label of critical theorist emerged. This is an important reminder of the importance of language in this research and semantics.

E3 The role of coding in qualitative data analysis

Basit (2003) discusses the role of coding in qualitative data analysis and examines the use of manual and electronic methods to code data that was collected by in-depth interviewing. This was a helpful paper to contemplate when I was having difficulty with my data analysis. Particularly as the analysis of qualitative data is not well articulated in the literature, especially for phenomenographic analysis.

E4 Coding memo

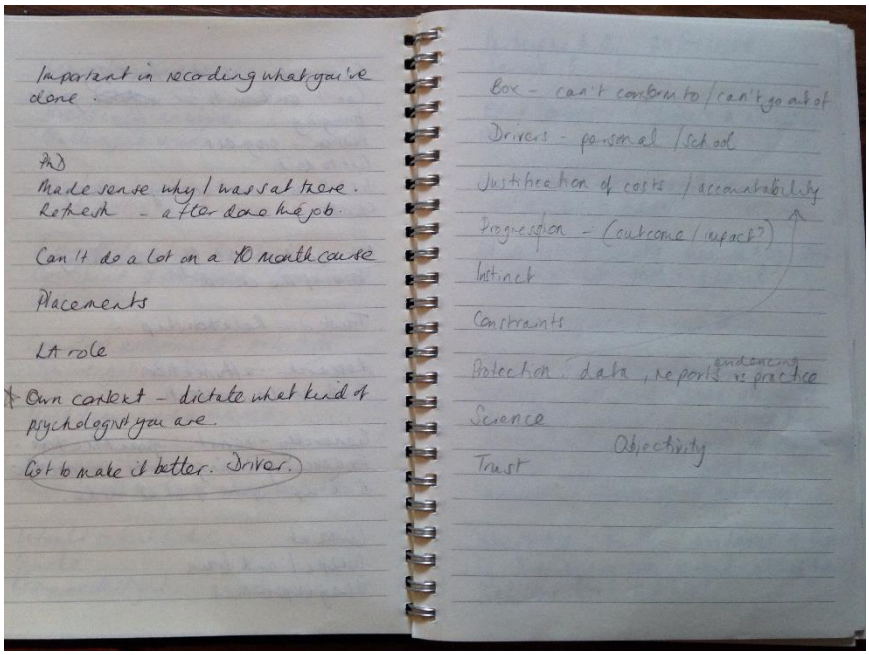
I kept notes relating to the data collection and analysis for the purpose of logging my thinking around the developing themes so that the steps in the data analysis could be understood. Memo-writing helped me to keep track of the steps in my thinking, as well as identify any changes in analytic thinking or emerging concepts (Willig, 2010).



Appendix F – Phenomenographic Analysis Examples

Stage 1: Familiarisation with the text of the interviews

F1 Unmediated associations and reactions



F2 Initial identification

Respondent	Knowledge or assumptions? My knowledge of it is that it's really important that we should be doing it, but that often the constraints whether that's kind of f- those are financial, systemic, what model you kind of work within. Perhaps curtail or limits your ability to kind of use the best interventions, buy them in. Like recently we wanted to kind of roll out the friends model, the resiliency group intervention, and it was just at a higher level, it's a really evidence based a- approach, but the cost of the training was just, wasn't... they just, the senior management didn't feel that we could afford to- to offer that, which is disappointing cos it's- it's so evidence based, it was a kind of resilience intervention. So yeah, that's just one example of where...
Interviewer	And how have you come to your understanding of evidence based practice?
Respondent	I think through the training and just knowing that kind of as scientist- scientist practitioners [laughs] that we, I don't know why I like thinking about that term, but you know, that term's used a lot in your training, and so we should be kind of looking at kind of the best available kind of evidence that we should be looking at the evidence base is it robust. And if not like certainly through the training course, even through, yeah, even through the training course we were encouraged to look at where the gaps in the research are, and how- how we as trainees can help to address that. So I think it's come from the training.

AR **Arnell, Ruth**
Evidence—research
Evidence--context
Influence--training
Influence—practicalities
Knowledge

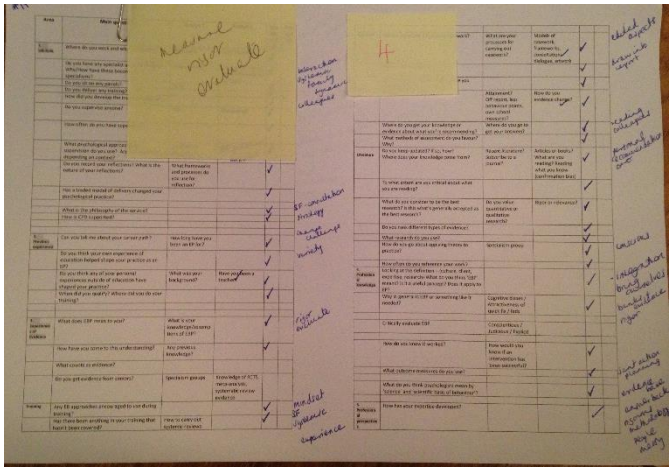
AR **Arnell, Ruth**
Evidence
Influence--practicalities

AR **Arnell, Ruth**
Senior EPs or other SLT?

AR **Arnell, Ruth**
Influence—training—uni
Knowledge--psychological framework

AR **Arnell, Ruth**
Influence—training—uni
Evidence--research

F3 Preliminary response shown on post-it note / developing dominating conceptualisation



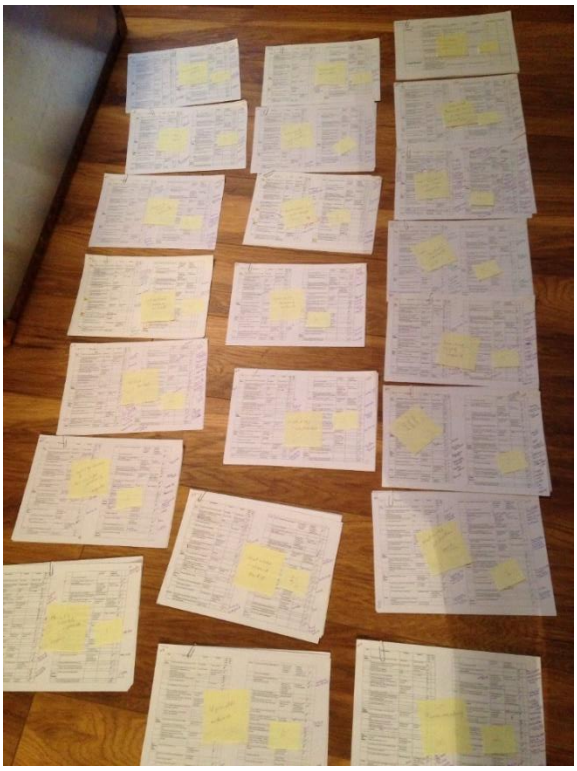


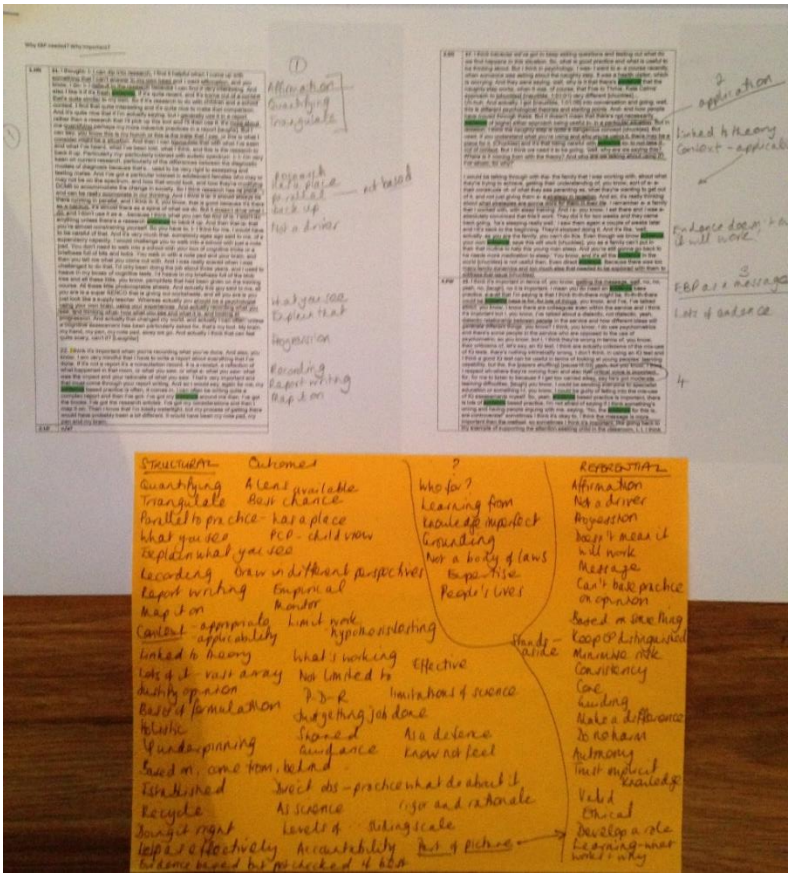
Table 13 Developing categories from dominating conceptions.

Focus of participant	Predominant conception
What works - context	2/3
What works - context	4
Measure rigour evaluate	4
Good evidence measure evaluate	4
Psychology understanding	2
Psychology principles evidence	2
What works pull together	3
Understand basis pull together	3
What works make change child	3
What works measure evaluate	4
Values, choice, child	5
Ethical and scientific approach	1
What works relationship	3
Accountable standards self	1/2
What worked appropriate tool, theory base pull together	3
Empirical evidence make sense integrate	4/5
Lens, literature experience child	5
Grounding reality and research	3
Reflect and review	4
What works pull together basis	2/3
What works research practice	1/2
Should be doing it best available evidence integrate	2

Key: 1-Psychologist, 2-Detective, 3- Bricoleur, 4-Manager, 5-Critical thinker

Stage 2 Condensation of the statements most significantly representing the emerging concepts.

F4 Pooled phrases for analysis



F5 Cases of variation or agreement grouped

F6 Developing themes from grouping

SCHEMA / (ASSUMPTIONS) / MEANING / PERCEPTION

INFLUENCES / HCPC / 'SEEING'

RATIONALE / (MOTIVATION) / ACCOUNTABILITY / OUTCOMES / GROUNDING / FUNDING

EVIDENCE AS (CONTENT) / TANGIBLE / PROOF / BOXES /SCIENCE / APPLIED / EFFECTIVE

MEDIATED BY / MORAL COMPASS /OWN PSYCHOLOGY/ TRAINING/ INSTINCT/ MARKET COMPETITION

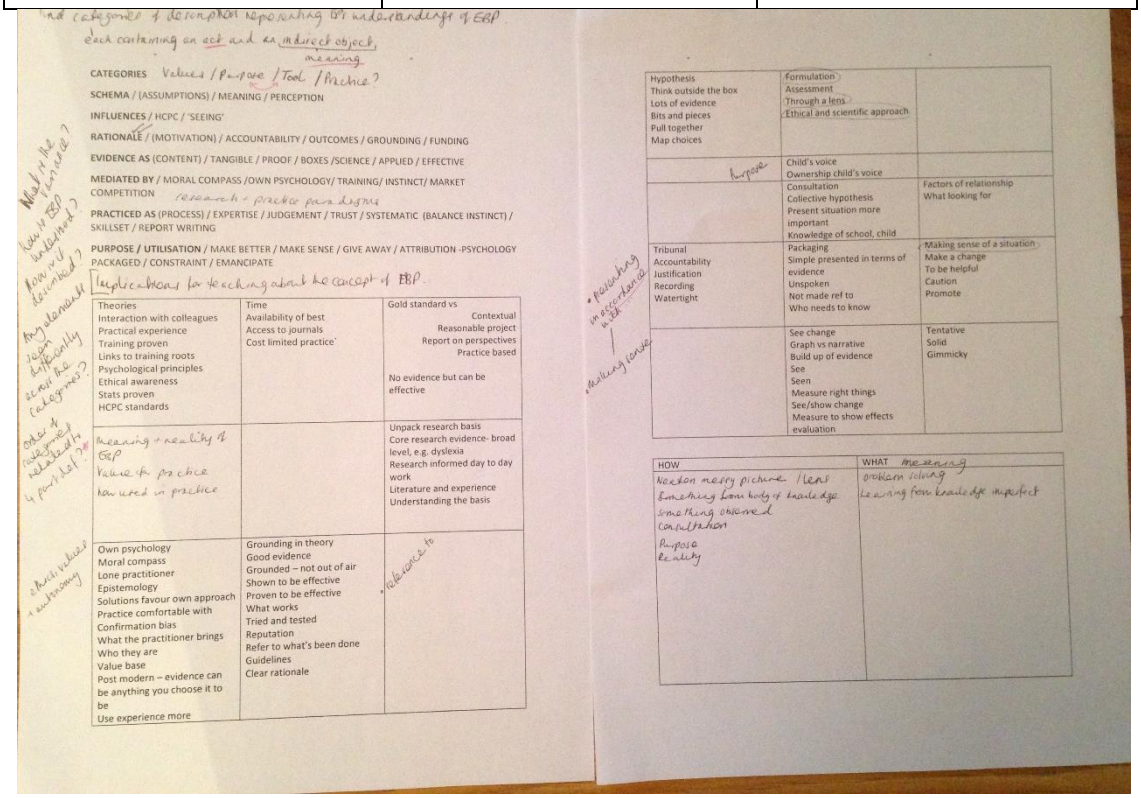
PRACTICED AS (PROCESS) / EXPERTISE / JUDGEMENT / TRUST / SYSTEMATIC (BALANCE INSTINCT) / SKILLSET / REPORT WRITING

PURPOSE / UTILISATION / MAKE BETTER / MAKE SENSE / GIVE AWAY / ATTRIBUTION -PSYCHOLOGY PACKAGED / CONSTRAINT / EMANCIPATE

Theories Interaction with colleagues Practical experience Training proven Links to training roots Psychological principles Ethical awareness Stats proven HCPC standards	Time Availability of best Access to journals Cost limited practice`	Gold standard vs Contextual Reasonable project Report on perspectives Practice based No evidence but can be effective
Own psychology Moral compass Lone practitioner Epistemology Solutions favour own approach Practice comfortable with Confirmation bias What the practitioner	Grounding in theory Good evidence Grounded – not out of air Shown to be effective Proven to be effective What works Tried and tested Reputation Refer to what's been	Unpack research basis Core research evidence-broad level, e.g. dyslexia Research informed day to day work Literature and experience Understanding the basis

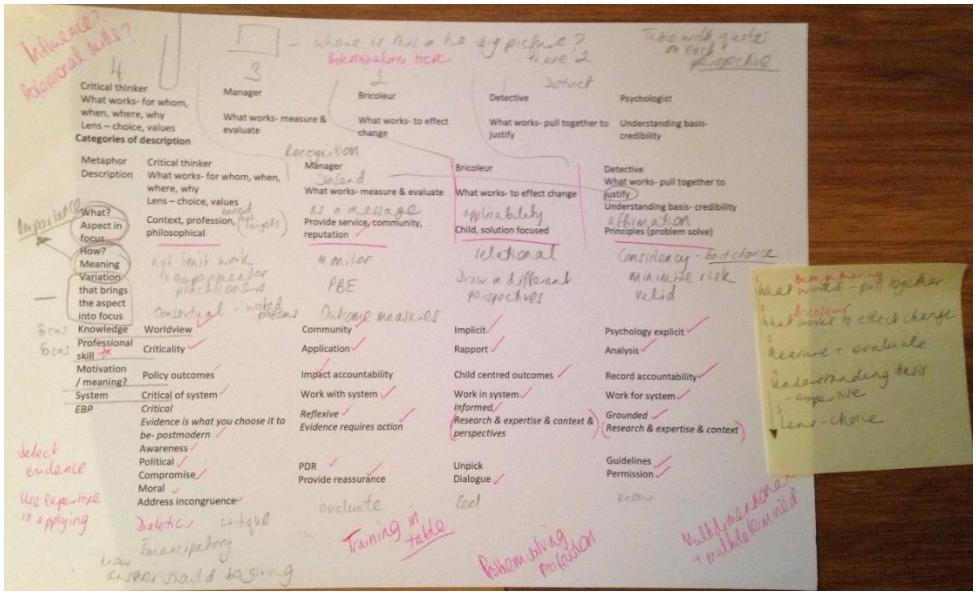
brings Who they are Value base Post modern – evidence can be anything you choose it to be Use experience more	done Guidelines Clear rationale	
Hypothesis Think outside the box Lots of evidence Bits and pieces Pull together Map choices	Formulation Assessment Through a lens Ethical and scientific approach	
	Child's voice Ownership child's voice	
	Consultation Collective hypothesis Present situation more important Knowledge of school, child	Factors of relationship What looking for
Tribunal Accountability Justification Recording Watertight	Packaging Simple presented in terms of evidence Unspoken Not made ref to Who needs to know	Making sense of a situation Make a change To be helpful Caution Promote
	See change Graph vs narrative Build up of evidence See Seen Measure right things	Tentative Solid Gimmicky

	See/show change Measure to show effects evaluation	
EBP – broad set of academic skills	Skills	Undergrad
EBP – critical, investigative mind set	Criticality- evaluate, apply, analyse, synthesise	doc
EBP- innovation	Own opinion on literature, adapting and improving	Practice



F7 Developing categories of description

Version 1

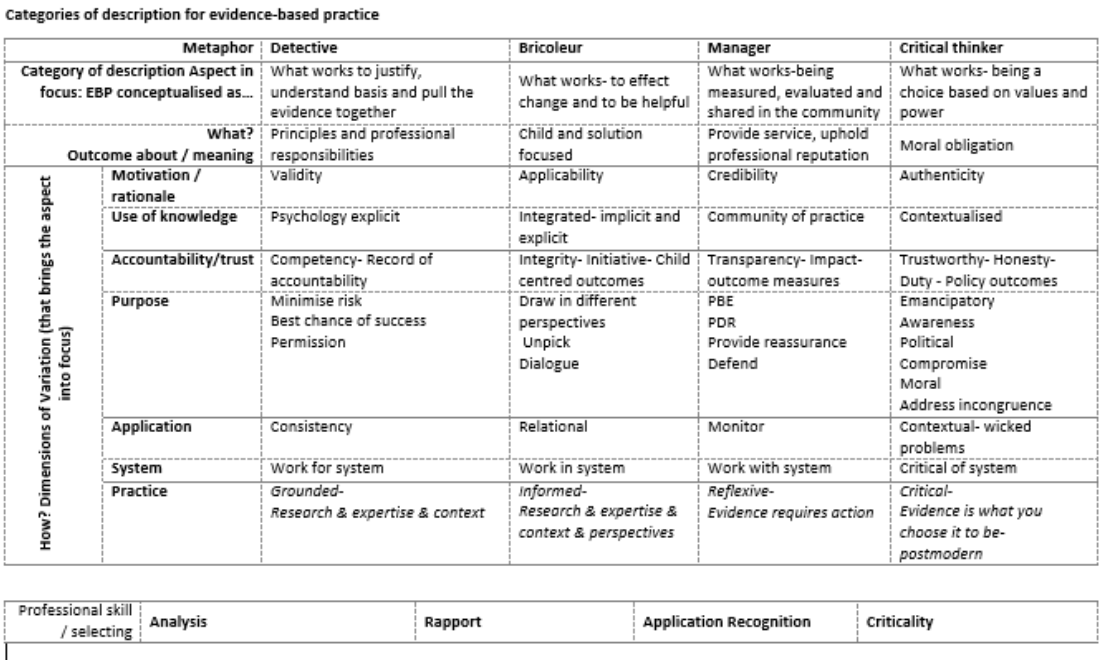


Version 2

Categories of description for evidence-based practice

		Metaphor	Detective	Bricoleur	Manager	Critical thinker
		Category of description **Aspect in focus: EBP conceptualised as…**	What works- pull together to justify, understanding basis- credibility	What works- to effect change	What works- measure & evaluate	What works- for whom, when, where, why Lens – choice, values
		What? **Outcome about / meaning**	Principles (problem solve)	Child, solution focused	Provide service, community, reputation	Moral obligation Context, profession, philosophical
How? Outcome arranged **Dimensions of Variation (that brings the aspect into focus) Themes of awareness- act to logically link and separate the conceptions**		**Motivation**	Affirmation	Applicability	As a message	Not limited to experimenter practitioners
		View of knowledge	Psychology explicit	Implicit	Community of practice	Worldview- contextualised
		Professional skill / selecting	Analysis	Rapport	Application Recognition	Criticality
		Importance	Minimise risk Best chance of success	Draw in different perspectives	PBE	Emancipatory
		Application	Consistency	Relational	Monitor	Contextual- wicked problems
		Interpretation information	Know	Feel	Evaluate	Dialectic / critique
		Accountability	Competency- Record of accountability	Integrity- Initiative- Child centred outcomes	Transparency- Impact- outcome measures	Trustworthy- Honesty- Duty - Policy outcomes
		System	Work for system	Work in system	Work with system	Critical of system
		EBP as practiced	*Grounded-* *Research & expertise & context*	*Informed-* *Research & expertise & context & perspectives*	*Reflexive-* *Evidence requires action*	*Critical-* *Evidence is what you choose it to be- postmodern*
		EBP as a tool	Guidelines Permission Valid	Unpick Dialogue	PDR Provide reassurance Defend	Awareness Political Compromise Moral Address incongruence Know answer should be giving

Version 3(Penultimate)



Categories of description for evidence-based practice

	Metaphor	Detective	Bricoleur	Manager	Critical thinker
Category of description Aspect in focus: EBP conceptualised as…		What works to justify, understand basis and pull the evidence together	What works- to effect change and to be helpful	What works-being measured, evaluated and shared in the community	What works- being a choice based on values and power
What? Outcome about / meaning		Principles and professional responsibilities	Child and solution focused	Provide service, uphold professional reputation	Moral obligation
How? Dimensions of Variation (that brings the aspect into focus)	Motivation / rationale	Validity	Applicability	Credibility	Authenticity
	Use of knowledge	Psychology explicit	Integrated- implicit and explicit	Community of practice	Contextualised
	Accountability/trust	Competency- Record of accountability	Integrity- Initiative- Child centred outcomes	Transparency- Impact-outcome measures	Trustworthy- Honesty- Duty - Policy outcomes
	Purpose	Minimise risk Best chance of success Permission	Draw in different perspectives Unpick Dialogue	PBE PDR Provide reassurance Defend	Emancipatory Awareness Political Compromise Moral Address incongruence
	Application	Consistency	Relational	Monitor	Contextual- wicked problems
	System	Work for system	Work in system	Work with system	Critical of system
	Practice	*Grounded-* *Research & expertise & context*	*Informed-* *Research & expertise & context & perspectives*	*Reflexive-* *Evidence requires action*	*Critical-* *Evidence is what you choose it to be-* *postmodern*

Professional skill / selecting	Analysis	Rapport	Application Recognition	Criticality

F8 Developing dimensions of variation

Dimension of Variation	(A) Detective	(B) Bricoleur	(C) Manager	(D) Critical thinker
Motivation / rationale	Validity	Applicability	Credibility	Authenticity
Use of knowledge	Psychology explicit	Integrated-implicit and explicit	Community of practice	Contextualised
Accountability / trust	Competency-Record of accountability	Integrity Initiative (to achieve child centred outcomes)	Transparency Impact-outcome measures	Trustworthy Honesty
Purpose	Minimise risk Best chance of success Permission	Draw in different perspectives Unpick Dialogue	PBE PDR Provide reassurance Defend	Emancipatory Awareness Political Compromise Moral Address incongruence
Application	Consistency	Relational	Monitor	Contextual-

				wicked problems
System	Work for system	Work in system	Work with system	Critical of system (meta)
Practice	Grounded- Research & expertise & context	Informed- Research & expertise & context & perspectives	Reflexive- Evidence requires action	Critical- Evidence is what you choose it to be- postmodern

F9 Developing the category of description

Detective: evidence-based practice as what works- to justify, understand the basis and pull evidence together

This category of evidence-based practice is about understanding the psychological basis for the work carried out in practice. In this category evidence is taken from research, expertise and context. The educational psychologist applies their knowledge about psychology, gleaned from research evidence and practice experience, including the practice of colleagues. The educational psychologist works for the system and is accountable and aware of their professional responsibilities. The educational psychologist looks to evidence and guide lines for permission. The educational psychologist prefers to be grounded in empirically supported psychological principles and data.

Dimensions of Variation	**Key Aspect / Theme**	**Excerpts from the interviews**
Rationale	Validity	*You- you- you get a grasp of, you- you know, needing to base any kind of judgement on something. Can't just, kind of, have an idea and think, 'that sounds like a good idea.' You know, you've got to have some evidence for that. (2)* *I suppose it means the theories that I use in order to work with a young person, so that tool is appropriate to working with them. And then it*

		also feeds into the recommendations that I would make to schools. Although given time constraints of service and what schools expect. I feel that a lot of the evidence based stuff goes un- under the surface and it's often unspoken. Although we might use it as EPs, it's not necessarily something we share with the school… And it wasn't like that was of any interest to them. So I felt like I was wasting my time in writing out reams and reams, and I think as long as I had the understanding of where it came from, it wasn't important for the schools to know that. (6) *Well, it means that th-there's a- there's a- you know, there's a clear- there's a clear- clear rationale, some evidence, that leads you to suppose that something's going to be effective or is- is- has proved to be. (7)* *I think what I would add to that is evidence-based practice is the empirical evidence for research but also the evidence of the child's needs and just how we integrate all of those bits of evidence together to make sense of something. How have I come to understand that? I'm not sure. We used to do quite a lot of thinking about this I remember... It's not something I've done so much thinking about here other than when I did the Doctorate, of course. (22)*
Use of knowledge	Psychology explicit	*I think it's important when you're recording what you've done. And so I would say, again for me, my evidence based practice is often, it comes*

in, I can often be writing quite a complex report and then I've got- I've got my evidence around me then. I've got the books. I've got the research articles. I've got my considerations and then I map it on. Then I know that I'm totally watertight, but my process of getting there would have probably been a bit different. It would have been my note pad, my pen and my brain. (1)

I would probably say from my- the rigor of having done Masters, doctorate and, you know, seeing that actually if you can't actually put facts of evidence down there on the table, then what- what are we actually drawing from. So to me it makes logical sense that… So obviously I work with colleagues who- who've got a lot of rigor about their practice too, and so realising over the years that yeah, actually this is how we got things to show actually on the table. This is what people are saying. This is what facts or statistics say. This is what…then we can actually use that more rigorously. So I've come to it through my own study and from my own training and practice over the years. (17)

I think through the training and just knowing that kind of as scientist- scientist practitioners [laughs] that we, I don't know why I like thinking about that term, but you know, that term's used a lot in your training, and so we should be kind of looking at kind of the best available kind of evidence that we should be looking at the evidence base is it robust. And if not like certainly through the training course, even

		through, yeah, even through the training course we were encouraged to look at where the gaps in the research are, and how- how we as trainees can help to address that. So I think it's come from the training. (20) *I suppose evidence based practice, my understanding of the term is like decision-making or- or your professional involvement being in reference to literature, your experience [pause] yeah. I suppose you had perceptions on that at university on the doctorate, and [pause] yeah, yeah, I suppose that really. (21)*
Accountability / trust	Competency-Record of accountability	*My evidence based practice then is based on healthcare professions council and being true to my own psychology, and my own moral compass. And in thirteen, fourteen years I haven't deviated off my map, because I personally don't think you can afford to. Especially in my early career having had experiences of three tribunals, it certainly made me realise that in that process you are on your own and you have to be accountable as a psychologist. (1)* *I think evidence based practice is about the accountability of what you've used, why you've used it, why you've used it for that particular client, why that time, why then, and then what leads you to your recommendations. (1)*
Purpose	Minimise risk Best chance	*I've become a licenced trainer and that package is very much based on evidence, randomized*

of success	*controlled trials, there's a very strong*
Permission	*psychological basis behind it, so therefore I'm, happy's not the right word, but I understand the philosophy behind it, I agree with it and therefore I promote it. Where there is a lack of evidence for something, I'm much more cautious about whether I recommend it or not. (11)*
	I mean at the end of the day I want to be as effective as possible as a practitioner. (13)
	Okay. It means acting in a way or delivering information in a way that is supported by- by research. And it could be sort of like proper research [laughs] or it could just be experiences. So I might use- use things in my training that have been trialled in other schools and ha- and we've got some good qualitative data, you know, th- this has worked well, but that's not been statistically proven or anything like that, but actually we've seen it work well. So I would use that as evidence based practice as well. (16)
	I think partly that would be through the doctorate and placements on the doctorate probably, where you're working with another senior, you know, experienced EP, qualified EP, who is presenting things to you to use, and telling you where they've come from. And that message is- is sort of coming through subliminally that you…this is…you can recommend this because it's- it's been evidence based. (16)

		So making sure there's an evidence for what you're doing… it looks quite good, but what is the- the evidence for it. So I know I'm probably reluctant. Sometimes I think is that to my detriment, cos actually it might be quite a good tool, and actually is it useful to just kind of give some of the things a go. (18)
Application	Consistency	*So, using interventions and programmes that have a research base, I guess it's tending to, to use approaches which are tried and tested, bit more than just something that someone's written and hasn't got much of a, I don't know, a reputation. I guess it means that it's gonna, it's more likely to have an effect and some, there is actually some weight behind it, that this has worked for other situations and worked in the past. (9)* *I think it comes through that, I think all the- the doctoral work really sort of feeds that in and the- the thesis and everything where everything's got to be, everything you write has got to come from somewhere. And even things like the way that- I suppose the way that I did casework as a trainee, that I still do now, using things like an interactive factored framework, so just jotting down, you know, what do we know already? What's the e- the evidence and the facts we have already to lead us to a hypothesis? So I- I guess I think of that as evidence based as well – pulling together bits. (16)*

System	Work for system	*Knowledge or assumptions? My knowledge of it is that it's really important that we should be doing it, but that often the constraints whether that's kind of f- those are financial, systemic, what model you kind of work within. Perhaps curtail or limits your ability to kind of use the best interventions, buy them in. Like recently we wanted to kind of roll out the friends model, the resiliency group intervention, and it was just at a higher level, it's a really evidence based a- approach, but the cost of the training was just, wasn't…they just, the senior management didn't feel that we could afford to- to offer that, which is disappointing cos it's- it's so evidence based (20)*
Practice	*Grounded- Research & expertise & context*	*The first thing that springs to mind is evidence, as in research, but then within that there's research that maybe a little bit thin on the ground or a bit weak, so it's about the strength of that research and what the evidence base is within that, and then I think it's also about practice and the longer you've practiced the more experience you've had of what works and what doesn't' work. So, there's that evidence base that you build up for yourself and through colleagues and other EPs, knowing what works and what doesn't work. (5)* *My understanding is that evidence based practice refers to work that's been carried out, research, where feasible or possible, and then you take the salient aspects from that and embed it in your practice. (11)*

I think it's about like reality working because of research, so research is informing what people do out there on the ground, if that makes sense? So, you obviously got researchers who are kind of gathering data and then we're, and then obviously analysing it for certain groups and we're using that to inform our day-to-day work to make sure that it's got a sound kind of grounding for what we do rather than just plucking things out of the air and trying things. (12)

It's- it's approaches and strategies and [pause] in- in the sense of the- the way that I work, but also the suggestions I make to practitioners and parents. But it's based upon evidence of research that's been done in an ethical and scientific approach, you know, like double blinds and things like that. Evidence is based on the research that's been done. (13)

Yeah, [sighs] so using yeah, kind of research, published research or it could be like- [pause] or like my own experience from practice, or like using the evidence that the schools are giving you to then try and make an informed decision about what needs to happen next. (14)

But again, you know, going back to papers and things that have been written as well, and looking at other evidence. So I think it comes from different sources the way that I would consider we look at evidence based practice. (17)

Evidence based practice [sighs] means doing things that have an evidence base, so not just doing them because other people do them. Yeah, I suppose that's what it means. So it means having an awareness of why this works, why it doesn't work, finding out about things. Asking other people their experiences about using tools or approaches, that kind of thing. (19)

So I suppose it's little pieces of interactions and conversations over time that's led to how I view it. (19)

Evidence based practice? [Sighs] I guess drawing on the best available evidence to inform the actions, to inform your practice, the kind of, you know, lo- looking at what- what- what is the evidence for a particular approach. What is the best available evidence and trying to use that in practice if you can, it's not always possible [laughs], but…(20)

Looking at the empirical evidence to understand the best way forward to assessing or intervening or supporting situations as well as understanding the best available evidence we need to get to make sense of the situation in order to intervene. (22)

Appendix G – Focus Group Procedure

Adapted from Finch, H., Lewis, J. & Turley, C. (2013). Focus Groups. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. Nicholls & R. Ormston (Eds.), *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (2nd ed.) (pp. 211-242. London: SAGE Publications.

Focus Group

1. Scene setting and ground rules
    a. Personal introduction, outline of research topic, background info. Discussion provides an opportunity for active consultation/involvement in decision making. Consider and reflect on the points being raised.
    b. Confidentiality and voluntary nature of participation stressed. Explain need to audio record the discussion. Give an explanation of what will happen with the data and how the reportings will be reported and disseminated.
    c. Treat what people say as confidential and not to be repeated outside of the session.
    d. Inform participants about what will be expected of them and also set out how group will be conducted. Don't wait to be invited to speak, no right or wrong answers, everyone's views are of interest, aim to hear as many different thoughts as possible- feel free to say what they think and to say if agree or disagree with another. Ask questions of each other. Disagreement or difference in view is both acceptable and wanted.

2. Individual Introductions
    a. Switch on recorder!
    b. Note similarities- reinforce feeling of now being a group and that all are included

3. Opening topic
    a. General, neutral opener to build up group's discussion and dynamic
    b. Conceptual/ definitional issue spontaneous thoughts are sought
    c. Try to engage all participants
    d. Listen, ask further questions, rephrase, draw links between what people have said

4. Discussion
    a. Questions, open, expressed in simple language
    b. Listen to terms used by participants, explore their meaning and mirror that language in formulating further questions
    c. Note non-verbal language. This adds views of emphasis, which may not be picked up by the recording. "Everybody's nodding vigorously- why is that?" or "you've gone rather quiet- why is this subject harder to talk about?"
    d. Use flipchart paper to write up information for group to agree or refine together

5. Ending
    a. Signal in advance that the discussion is coming to an end. Relax the focus with general final points and questions.

b. Finish with a question that is positive, covering ideas about what could be done to improve a situation. Signal end- this is the final topic…
c. Clearly end the group- "is there anything that we've left out or that people feel they haven't had a chance to say?" and let participants know what will happen next and thank them for their contribution. Reaffirm confidentiality, reiterate purpose of research and how it will be used.
d. Likert scale / follow up?
e. Switch off recorder!

Maximising the Focus Group

1. Tips for widening discussion:

    a. Asking generally "how do people feel?" or "what does everyone else think?"

    b. Repeating the question or a fragment of it

    c. Highlighting a particular comment and asking for thoughts on it

    d. Asking the group directly, "can you say a bit more about that?"

    e. Looking around or gesturing to the rest of the group to come in

    f. Maintaining an expectant silence, to allow the group to reflect further on the issue

    g. Highlighting the difference in views and encouraging the group to discuss and explain them

    h. Ask if anyone has different view of experience

    i. Ask whether there are circumstances or situations under which the group would feel differently

    j. Probe shared views and assumptions

2. Tips for achieving greater depth:

    a. Draw attention to a point, asking for more comments on it or asking a specific question, e.g. asking whether they share similar views, or playing 'devil's advocate' and introducing a hypothetical counter view to the group.

    b. Ask them to reflect on the links or relationships between what people are saying

    c. If differing views are expressed, ask whether these are in conflict or could be reconciled, what the appropriate priority within or balance between them is or why such differences of view arise. Delve into diversity- get the group to engage with it, explain it and look at its causes and consequences.

    d. Focus on implications or consequences of what has been raised in individual examples.

Appendix H – Focus Group Stimuli

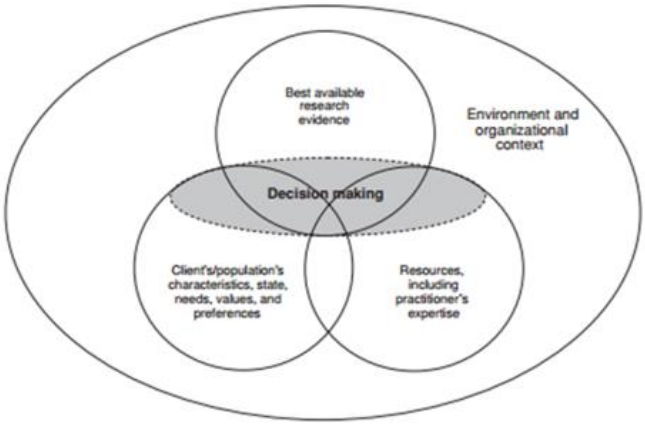
Focus Group Questions

1. How *do* EPs make decisions in practice?
   What is the influence of: scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models in practitioner expertise and judgement?
2. Where does an evidence-based practice approach fit in with scientist-practitioner and reflective practitioner models?
3. How would you define evidence-based practice in Educational Psychology?
4. How should evidence-based practice in educational psychology be taught?

Definitions of Evidence-based Practice provided

Transdisciplinary model of evidence-based practice

Satterfield, Spring, Brownson, Mullen, Newhouse, Walker, and Whitlock (2009),



Sources of Information for Evidence-based Practice (Management)

practitioner expertise and judgement	the local context
a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence	the perspectives of people who might be affected by the decision

Briner and Rousseau (2011)

Evidence-based practice in psychology (APA, 2005).

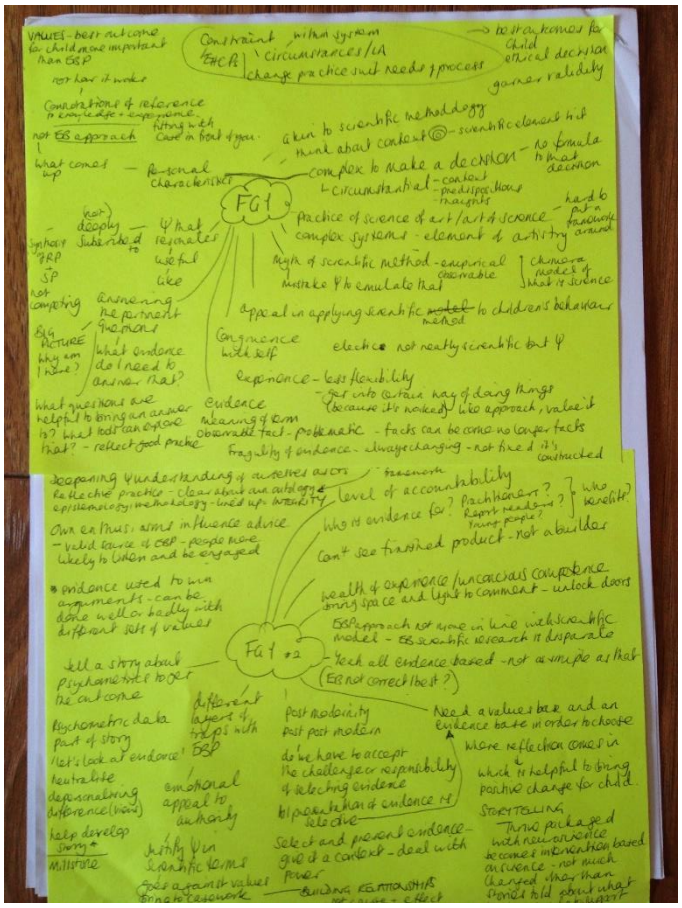
Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) has been established by the American Psychological Association (APA). They state:

"Evidence-based practice in psychology (EBPP) is the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (APA, 2005).

They also state that "The purpose of EBPP is to promote effective psychological practice and enhance public health by applying empirically supported principles of psychological assessment, case formulation, therapeutic relationship, and intervention" (ibid, 2005).

Appendix I – Framework Analysis Examples

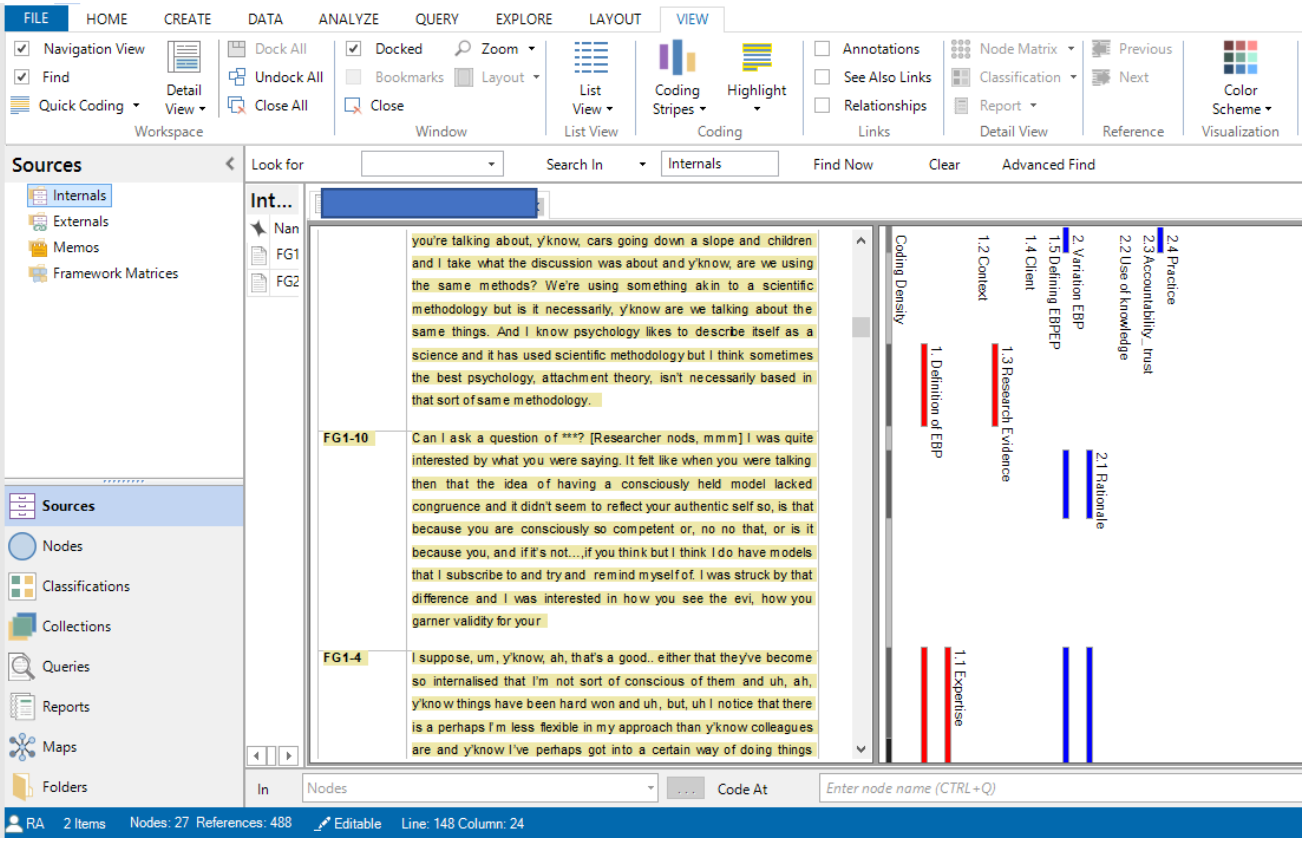
I1- Familiarisation



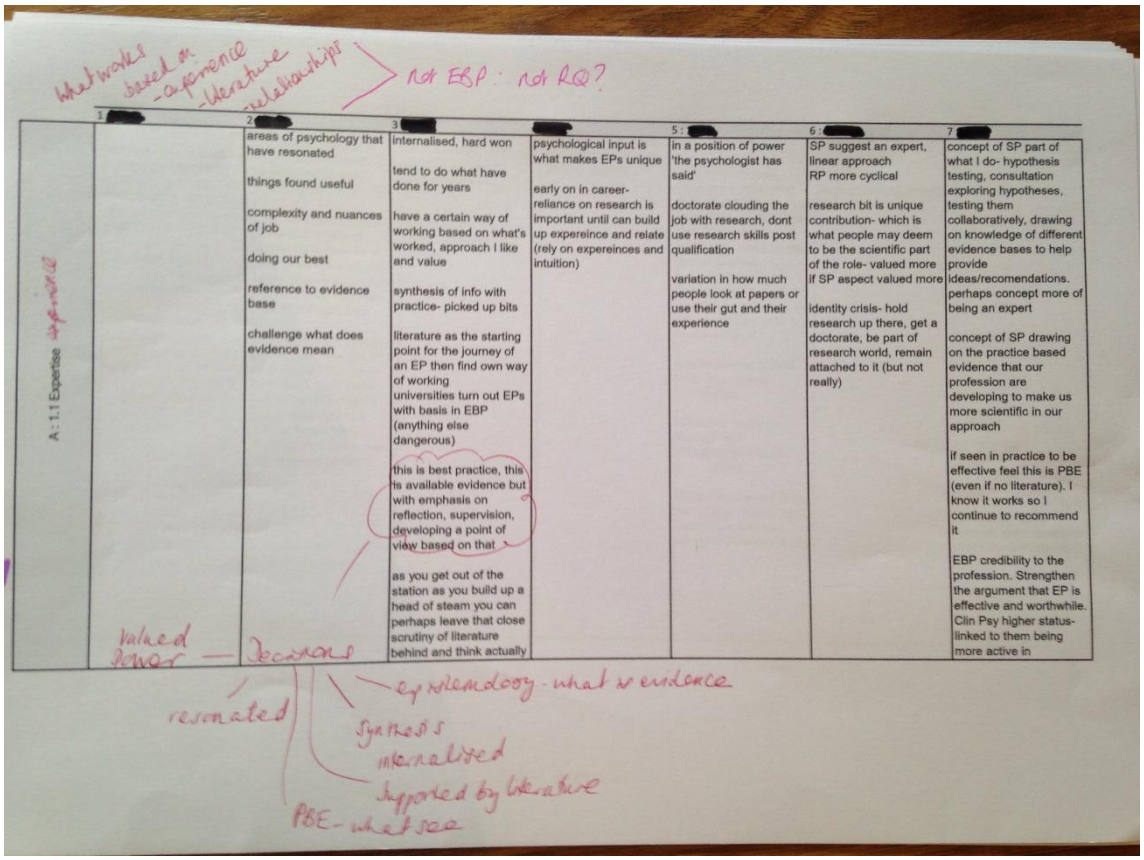
I2- Identifying thematic framework

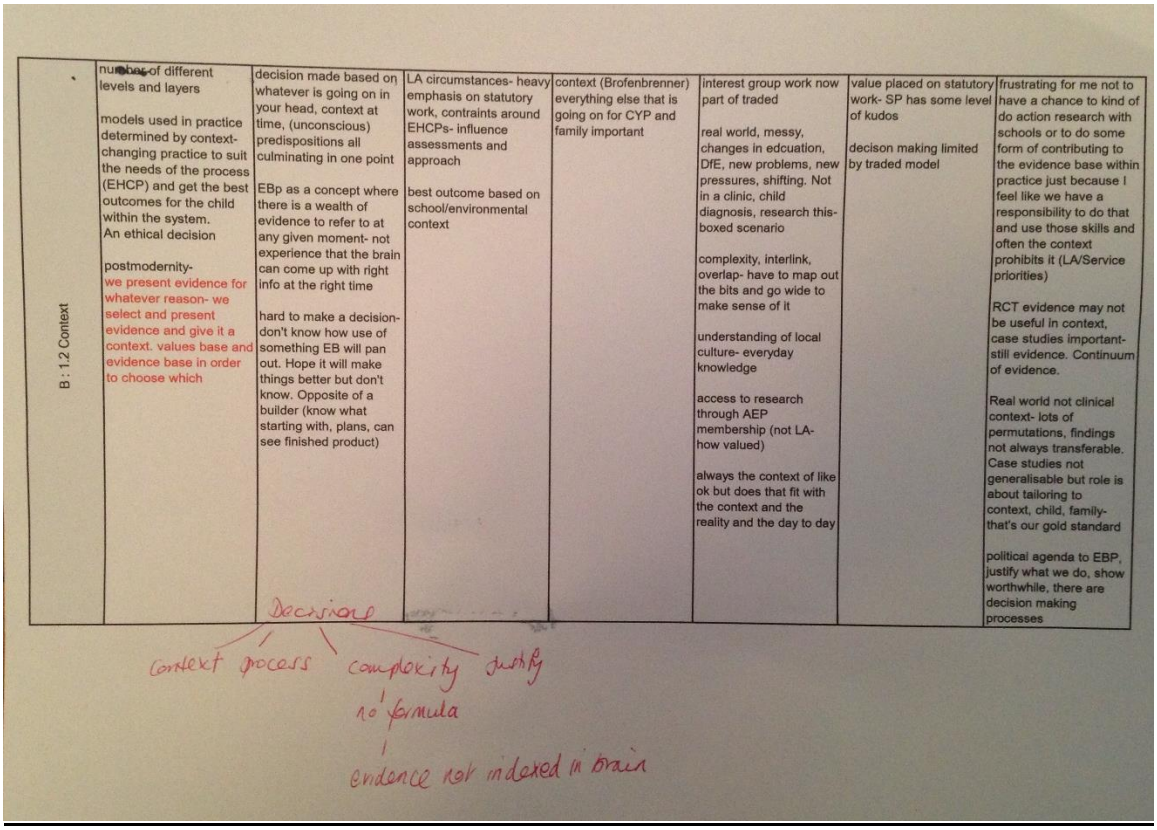
Name	Description
1. Definition of EBP	
1.1 Expertise	Relating to experience, competence
1.2 Context	Relating to circumstances: culture, systems
1.3 Research evidence	Relating to empirical study, systematic review, practice guidelines
1.4 Client	School, child, parents, LA
2. Variation EBP	
2.1 Rationale	Reasons or a logical basis for a course of action or belief, verification- process to demonstrate 'correct'
2.2 Use of knowledge	Source of knowledge, evidence, PBE, decisions
2.3 Trust	Garner trust, show accountability, agency, autonomy
2.4 Application of evidence	Applying EBP, put into action, how evidence used

I3- Indexing



I4- Charting





B : 1.2 Context	number of different levels and layers models used in practice determined by context- changing practice to suit the needs of the process (EHCP) and get the best outcomes for the child within the system. An ethical decision postmodernity- we present evidence for whatever reason- we select and present evidence and give it a context. values base and evidence base in order to choose which	decision made based on whatever is going on in your head, context at time, (unconscious) predispositions all culminating in one point EBp as a concept where there is a wealth of evidence to refer to at any given moment- not experience that the brain can come up with right info at the right time hard to make a decision- don't know how use of something EB will pan out. Hope it will make things better but don't know. Opposite of a builder (know what starting with, plans, can see finished product)	LA circumstances- heavy emphasis on statutory work, contraints around EHCPs- influence assessments and approach best outcome based on school/environmental context	context (Brofenbrenner) everything else that is going on for CYP and family important	interest group work now part of traded real world, messy, changes in edcuation, DfE, new problems, new pressures, shifting. Not in a clinic, child diagnosis, research this- boxed scenario complexity, interlink, overlap- have to map out the bits and go wide to make sense of it understanding of local culture- everyday knowledge access to research through AEP membership (not LA- how valued) always the context of like ok but does that fit with the context and the reality and the day to day	value placed on statutory work- SP has some level of kudos decison making limited by traded model	frustrating for me not to have a chance to kind of do action research with schools or to do some form of contributing to the evidence base within practice just because I feel like we have a responsibility to do that and use those skills and often the context prohibits it (LA/Service priorities) RCT evidence may not be useful in context, case studies important- still evidence. Continuum of evidence. Real world not clinical context- lots of permutations, findings not always transferable. Case studies not generalisable but role is about tailoring to context, child, family- that's our gold standard political agenda to EBP, justify what we do, show worthwhile, there are decision making processes

Decisions

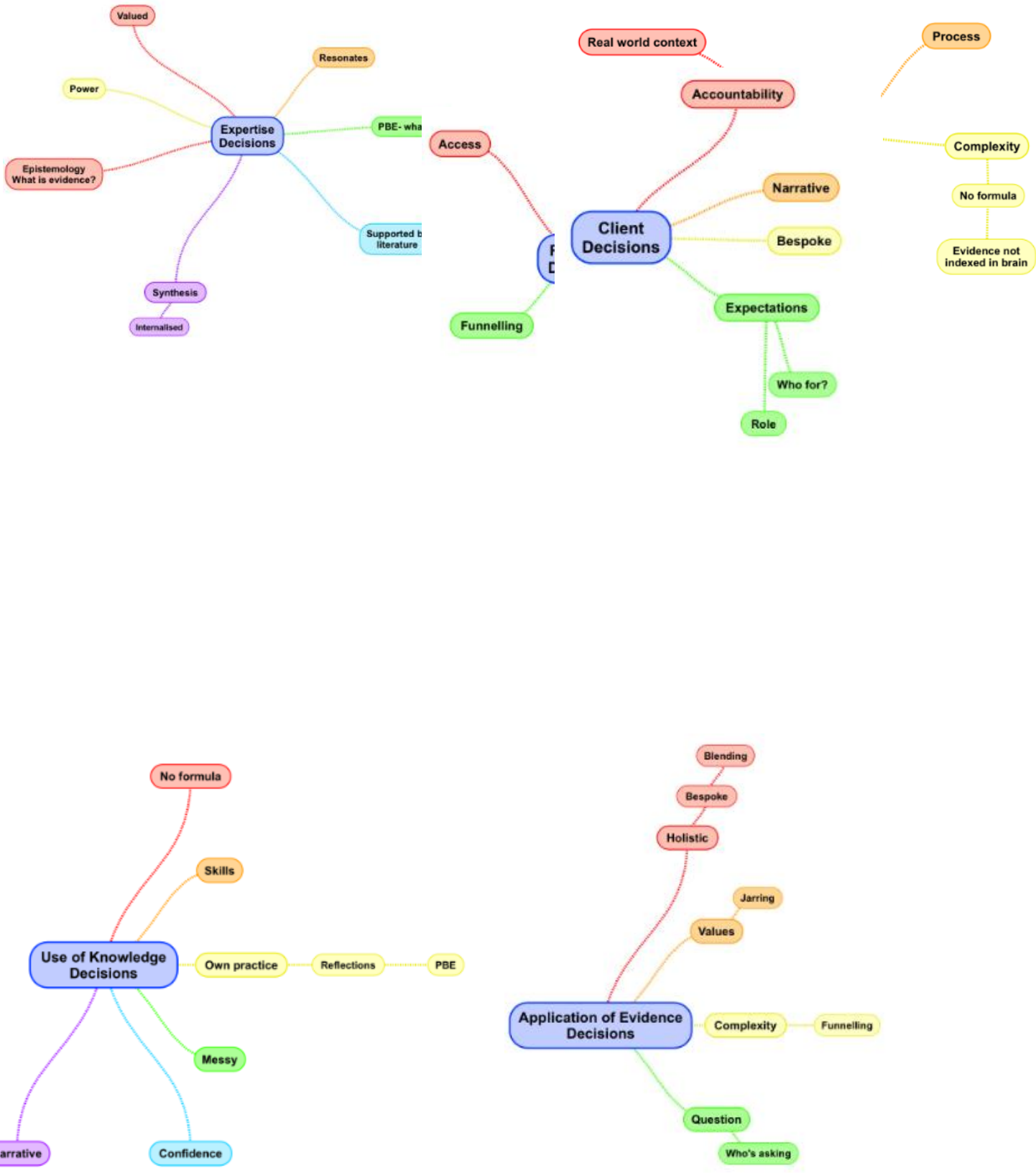
context process complexity justify

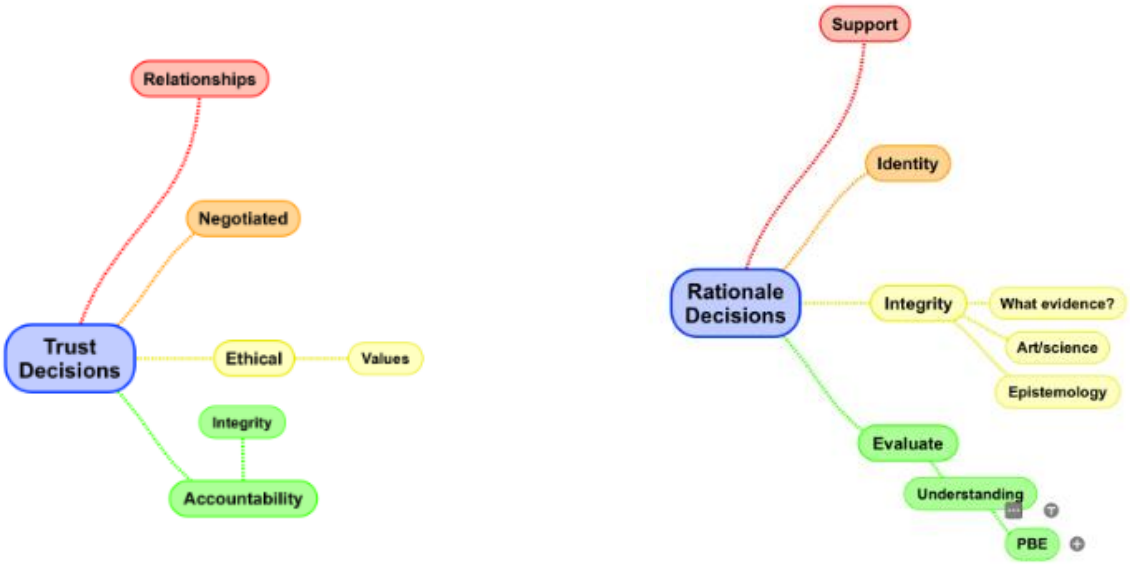
no formula

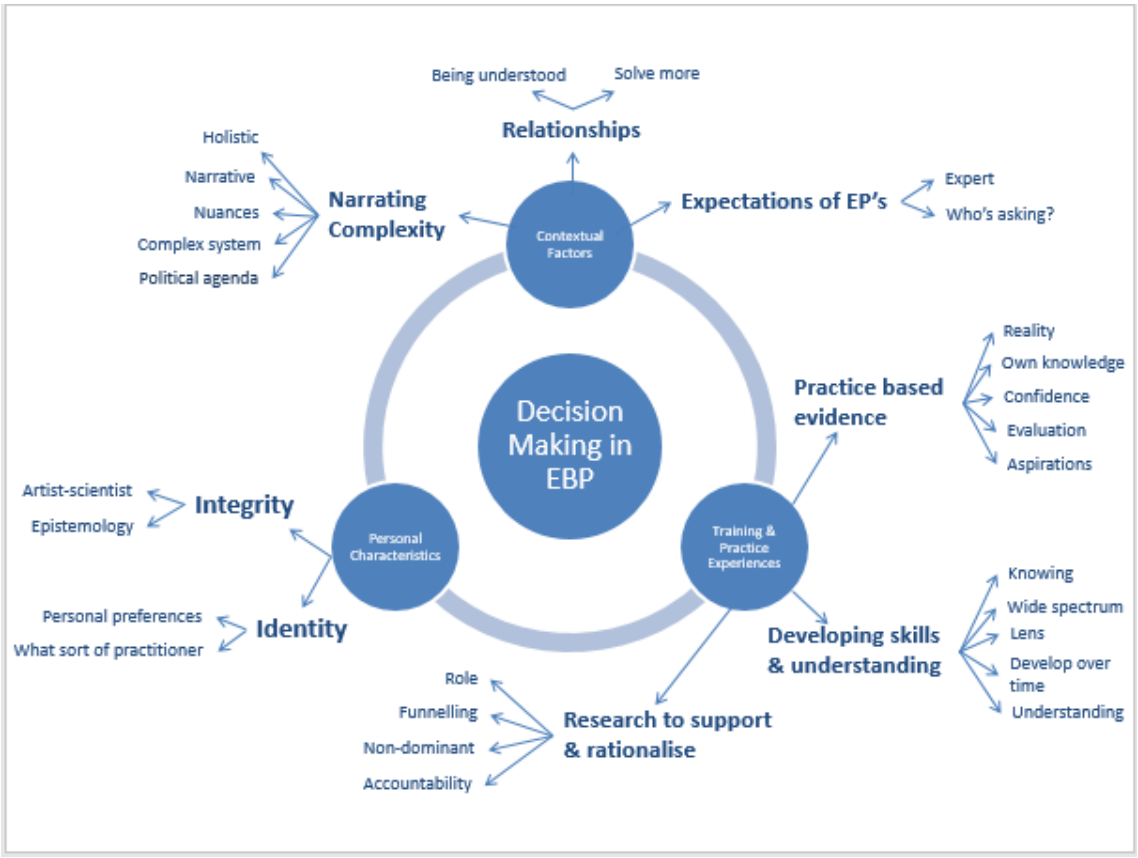
evidence not indexed in brain

I5- Mapping and interpretation

Thematic networks







I6- Research themes and concepts

Table 14 Framework analysis themes and concepts.

Theme	Concepts within theme	Example quote
Relationships	1. Relational aspects solve	*1. I develop a really good relationship with a SENCo and things get done in that*

	more than the evidence-base 2. Being understood	*school more readily than they would in a school that I don't have any relationship with the SENCo at all.* *2. Someone is not going to do it unless they feel they've been understood*
Expectations	3. Who's asking 4. Expert	*3. sometimes the models that we use in our practice, in my case anyway, is partly determined, not wholly but somewhat determined by who's… asking for piece of work.* *4. So I feel like I'm being forced, maybe more into a scientist, like an expert, people are like I'm paying you this money…I'm paying you I want an answer.*
Complexity	5. Nuances 6. Complex system 7. Political agenda 8. Holistic 9. Narrative	*5. I think it would just be the universities really emphasising the complexity of this to and the different nuances of our job.* *6. It's not really real world is it? I think that's why, maybe it does work better in clinical psychology, you're in a clinic and clinical settings and actually trying to do it in a real life setting, I think it doesn't work so well in educational psychology because it's so messy* *7. There's kind of a political agenda there too and that I think kind of looking at actually where the concept has come from and kind of how we have to be able to justify what we do and how we do that and that we are worthwhile as a profession.* *8. There is a more holistic approach to what Psychology is and people do use their personal experience much more and*

		think far more about, rather than what's wrong with this young person, what's going to be most helpful for this young person. *9. 'Evidence' can be a way of depersonalising differing views of a child that can be quite a helpful way of developing a more helpful story. (FG1-10)*
Practice-based evidence	10. Aspiration 11. Reality 12. Evaluation 13. Own knowledge 14. Confidence	*10. In terms of my own practice I would like, that would be frustrating for me not to have a chance to kind of do action research with schools or to do some form of contributing to the evidence base within practice just because I feel like we have a responsibility to do that and use those skills and often the context prohibits it.* *11. There's always the contextual stuff around like these are the ideals and this is what we want to do but always in our job or research or whatever there's always the context of like ok but does that fit with the context and the reality and the day to day.* *12. We're moving away a lot from, frustratingly, from getting the chance to review things and therefore, I think where that opportunity to review could then help us to develop our practice based evidence we're not really being able to do that because we're not going back to get the feedback to reflect on whether it's worked.* *13. I guess if they've seen in their practice that it's effective it's practice*

		based evidence…I know it works so I do continue to recommend it but then I just feel I think as practice based evidence and that is still important and is used to inform my practice. *14. I've done training on precision teaching and encouraging people to develop their own evidence to give them, not to weaponize but to give them professional confidence.*
Support of research	15. Accountability 16. Not dominant 17. Funnelling 18. Access 19. Role	*15. [It] gives us a level of accountability to all kinds of people. Y'know to ourselves, to the service, to stakeholders, and people that we're working with, the Local Authority.* *16. It feels like another tool in the box for me rather than the overarching framework for everything that I do.* *17. So start big [I'm interested in this area, start big] and then you'd refine it and refine it based on the context. That's probably definitely something I think about, so I've worked with a child with PDA before, ok let's think about what I did last time, the stuff I used, ok is this going to be useful in this context? Um, and then like narrow it* *18. the only way I access it is through being a member of the AEP so otherwise, I wouldn't be accessing EBSCO and research, so that again tells you something about how it's valued.* *19. I think we always want to hang on to that research bit because that gives us the unique contribution partly*

Skills	20. Wide spectrum 21. Develop over time 22. Psychological understanding 23. Knowing 24. Lens	*20. The work of the EP being on one end…, take an example VIG, so very reflective, very much around the relationship you have with the client, and parent, and then right, to coming to the other end of the spectrum about writing advices, which is very expert, lone working, with an outcome.* *21. The progression of an educational psychologist is y'know a journey but there's got to be starting point and I think that y'know using available literature is a good starting point.* *Maybe it relates to where you are in your career? ...if you're early on the reliance on research is more important until you've built up that experience and can relate.* *22. What is the decision-making process that you go through? Is it consciously in your control or is it just because you've had a load of information put in your brain and that's what comes up at a particular time? To me it's about deepening the psychological understanding of it.* *23. Yeah, I think I'm just a little bit resistant to the concept that I have somewhere in here I have a wealth of evidence that I just refer to at any given moment and it just comes up with exactly the right information at the right time.* *24. I suppose the different types of evidence could be different for a scientist practitioner lens and a reflective practitioner lens. Is that evidence based*

		practice or is that practice based evidence and when does the one become the other? (FG2-19)
Identity	25. Personal preferences 26. What sort of practitioner	*25. You get EPs that definitely pick to do cognitive assessments all the time because that's their preference, their expertise and then others who do a more mixed model and others who will do loads of consultations and no cognitive assessments. So there's definitely a context of like what people are comfortable, or their preference is.* *26. I've never, sort of, consciously described myself as a scientist I suppose that if I was to use a model and I wouldn't consciously use a model either, I'm a reflective practitioner.* *I think there's an element for me of scientific and reflective practice and it's a blending of the two for me rather than seeing them as two competing models.*
Integrity	27. Epistemology 28. Artist-scientist 29. Values	*27. Getting to a point through reflective practice where you can be more clear about your own ontology and therefore your epistemology and then your methodology and then having them all lined up so that your practice is sort of has integrity.* *28. The practice of science of art and art of science? I've loved that phrase since my childhood. And in really complex systems there has to be an element of art-is-try to that. There's, which is why you might have a different outcome tomorrow from today and that's ok, it*

		doesn't make either decision wrong or better necessarily but it's very hard then to put words and to put a framework around how you get there I think. *29. An experience for me commonly in casework would be to sort of to remind myself to step back from all this information and sort of think what questions, what helpful, what most pertinent questions are arising, based on a set of values and then what evidence would I need in order to answer that question. I'll often start, I'll nearly always ask practitioners, people I work with, what's the question I'm looking for answer to.*

Full quotes to give context to quote presented in Table 13.

Table 15 Full quotes of concepts.

1	I feel that so much of our role depends on relationships and interactions with people and I struggle with evidence-based practice being where those two things fit together so if I develop a really good relationship with a SENCo and things get done in that school more readily than they would in a school that I don't have any relationship with the SENCo at all, there's nothing different in what I've recommended, it's just it happens in that school more than it happens in that school [18- because they trust you] because they do it because they've got a relationship with me, they trust my judgement [18- yeah] and I've recommended exactly the same thing in this school but then it hasn't worked so and that's not to do with the evidence. (FG2-19)
2	Someone is not going to do it unless they feel they've been understood and you've understood their context and you've understood the problem and that you get them and therefore that's why you're suggesting this stuff. If they don't feel understood then they're not going to. (FG2-18)
3	*Pressures around statutory work and the fact that sometimes the models that we use in our practice, in my case anyway, is partly determined, not wholly but somewhat determined by who's… asking for piece of work.* (FG1-10)
4	*So I feel like I'm being forced, maybe more into a scientist, like an expert, people are like I'm paying you this money or, and I feel, I've noticed that I'm feeling more uncomfortable in, since September in my role and feeing more judged and more like*

	people are thinking I'm paying you I want an answer. (FG2-18)
5	*I think it would just be the universities really emphasising the complexity of this to and the different nuances of our job and how the different… I suppose having an evidence base but with reference to, I'm just thinking really challenging people to think what does evidence mean. When you make a decision how do you know what that's going to look like in the future? Um, what is the decision-making process that you go through? Is it consciously in your control or is it just because you've had a load of information put in your brain and that's what comes up at a particular time? To me it's about deepening the psychological understanding of it. (FG1-21)*
6	*It's not really real world is it? I think that's why, maybe it does work better in clinical psychology, you're in a clinic and clinical settings and you can't apply it, to um, that's just made me think, as I was just saying that, of the Coventry Grid and that paper recently in EPIP around like things being in a very kind of clinical setting and actually in a real life, like how can you, make those, trying to do it in a real life setting, and I think it doesn't work so well in educational psychology because it's so messy and Things are changing with education and DfE and what people want and the new problems and new pressures of things arise because of all these new pressures, like it's shifting quite a lot and it's messy.* (FG2-18)
7	*There's kind of a political agenda there too and that I think kind of looking at actually where the concept has come from and kind of how we have to be able to justify what we do and how we do that and that we are worthwhile as a profession and that we're not just going in kind of, we have decision making processes and I think, I don't know, I just wonder how much the kind of wider concept is looked at. (FG2-20)*
8	*There is a more holistic approach to what Psychology is and um, people do use their personal experience much more and think far more about, rather than what's wrong with this young person, it's what's going to be most helpful for this young person (FG1-4)*
9	I think it's about that narrative, saying y'know it becomes more than being nice to naughty children, it becomes an intervention based on science. And I think y'know nothing much has changed other than the stories that's being told about what teachers can do to support children. (FG1-04) 'Evidence' can be a way of depersonalising differing views of a child that can be quite a helpful way of developing a more helpful story. (FG1-10) It might be that we have to tell a story about the psychometrics but it's to say, to get that young person the resources or getting the teacher to be nicer to that younger person, or something else. (FG1-10)
10	*In terms of my own practice I would like, that would be frustrating for me not to have a chance to kind of do action research with schools or to do some form of contributing to the evidence base within practice just because I feel like we have a responsibility to do that and use those skills and often the context prohibits it. (FG2-20)*
11	*There's always the contextual stuff around like these are the ideals and this is what we want to do but always in our job or research or whatever there's always the context of*

	like ok but does that fit with the context and the reality and the day to day. (FG2-18)
12	Well see I think that's why, what we were talking about earlier reviewing and the fact that we're moving away a lot from, frustratingly, from getting the chance to review things and therefore, I think where that opportunity to review could then help us to develop our practice based evidence we're not really being able to do that because we're not going back to get the feedback to reflect on whether it's worked, looking at efficacy, you may just be moving on to the next case and actually maybe we need to think about how the reviewing is a key part of building practice based evidence and looking at how, where there's TMEs or whatever way we're using to evaluate whether we need to be more, (FG2-20)
13	I guess if they've seen in their practice that it's effective it's practice based evidence and that we should, I feel we are well positioned to, uh, be able to, like things like guided imagery scripts or like I find like mindfulness scripts, really like effective and they work and I would recommend them quite a lot or suggest them but then the more I think the evidence, I don't know what the evidence base is there, uh, I am aware that is there anything on EPIP I can draw on but I know it works so I do continue to recommend it but then I just feel I think as practice based evidence and that is still important and is used to inform my practice (FG2-20)
14	*I've done training on precision teaching and encouraging people to develop their own evidence to give them, not to weaponize but to give them professional confidence. (FG1-10)*
15	*…gives us a level of accountability to all kinds of people. Y'know to ourselves, to the service, to stakeholders, and people that we're working with, the Local Authority, to whoever needs, but y'know to whoever... (FG1-10)*
16	*It feels like another tool in the box for me rather than the overarching framework for everything that I do.* (FG1-10)
17	*so start big [FG2-18- I'm interested in this area, start big] and then you'd refine it and refine it based on the context [FG2-18- have I done this before?] That's probably definitely something I think about, so I've worked with a child with PDA before, ok let's think about what I did last time, the stuff I used, ok is this going to be useful in this context? Um, then [pause] yeah and then like narrow it (FG2-19)*
18	*And that's really interesting actually because the only way I access it is through being a member of the AEP so otherwise, I wouldn't be accessing EBSCO and research, so that again tells you something about how it's valued. (FG2-18)* *but then we go to like the conferences and where you've got practitioners sharing their research (FG2-20*
19	*I think our training probably prepares us really well to do that, just to question and we do that in our role everyday anyway in different reasons.* (FG1-19) *When we were training there was this thing around EPs having a bit of an identity crisis and we don't quite know who we are or what we do and can't actually define it when we're asked. So I think we always want to hang on to that research bit because that*

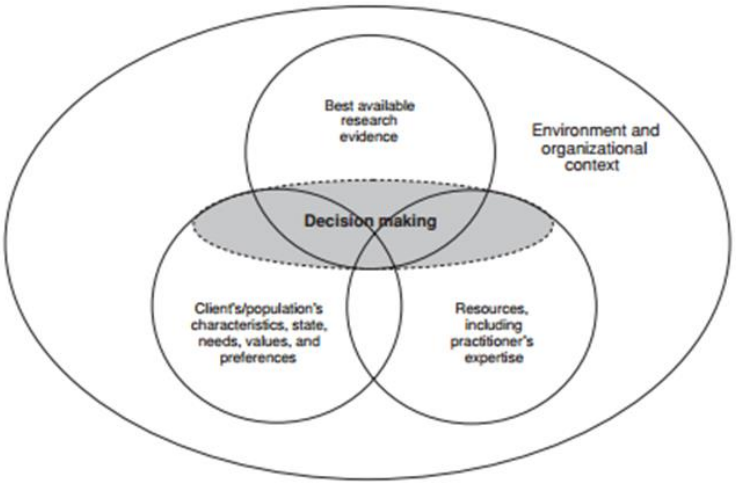
	gives us the unique contribution partly, so it's kind of trying to figure out where it all fits together. I think you're right, I think that is really important to our role because it is what people may deem to be the scientific bit that we do, if they perhaps place more value on the scientist practitioner aspect (FG1-19)
20	*The work of the EP being on one end…, take an example VIG, so very reflective, very much around the relationship you have with the client, and parent, and then right, to coming to the other end of the spectrum about writing advices, which is very expert, lone working, with an outcome.* (FG2-19)
21	*The progression of an educational psychologist is y'know a journey but there's got to be starting point and I think that y'know using available literature is a good starting point and through y'know a period of time you sort of synthesise that you find your own way of working and perhaps it's been some time since you've read a journal article or a book or something like that relating to psychology because y'know you're in your ways.* (FG1-04) *Maybe it relates to where you are in your career? I'm pretty inexperienced compared to everyone else so they can rely more on their experiences and that intuitive- ness whereas if you're early on the reliance on research is more important until you've built up that experience and can relate. (FG1-06)*
22	I think it would just be the universities really emphasising the complexity of this to and the different nuances of our job and how the different… I suppose having an evidence base but with reference to, I'm just thinking really challenging people to think what does evidence mean. When you make a decision how do you know what that's going to look like in the future? Um, what is the decision-making process that you go through? Is it consciously in your control or is it just because you've had a load of information put in your brain and that's what comes up at a particular time? To me it's about deepening the psychological understanding of it. (FG1-21)
23	*Yeah, I think I'm just a little bit resistant to the concept that I have somewhere in here I have a wealth of evidence that I just refer to at any given moment and it just comes up with exactly the right information at the right time. I just, that isn't my experience and y'know I can only say that for myself. (FG1-21)*
24	*I suppose the different types of evidence could be different for a scientist practitioner lens and a reflective practitioner lens. I think I talked about in my interview kind of reflection itself and your own experiences as an EP being evidence of something working, not at all based on a double blind, control group study [Hayley-yeah, it's very different isn't it], I tried this once and it worked really well so maybe you should give this a go. Is that evidence based practice or is that practice based evidence and when does the one become the other? (FG2-19)*
25	*I think that's key, [19- It's massive] I mean you definitely pick like, you get EPs that definitely pick to do cognitive assessments all the time because that's their preference, their expertise and then others who do a more mixed model and others who will do loads of consultations and no cognitive assessments. So there's definitely a context of like what people are comfortable, or their preference is, or whatever the reason they do*

	it for, there's definitely ways that, particular ways of doing things for particular reasons. (FG2-18)
26	I*'ve never, sort of, consciously described myself as a scientist I suppose and I suppose I would much… say that if I was to use a model and I wouldn't consciously use a model either, I'm a reflective practitioner.(FG1-4)* *I think there's an element for me of scientific and reflective practice and it's a blending of the two for me rather than seeing them as two competing models. (FG1-10)*
27	*Getting to a point through reflective practice where you can be more clear about your own ontology and therefore your epistemology and then your methodology and then having them all lined up so that your practice is sort of has integrity and so can if someone says why did you do that you can refer back up to your epistemology… and then back up to your ontology and it actually is sound, it works and I think for me the ability to do that is partly what defines us, makes us different, um and it's, so what I value as a result of that is being given tools to help me think more clearly within that framework which I have decided upon, uh and to check that I'm still doing that, lining up those things and evidence-based practice might be one of those tools but it's far from being the most important or the only one.* (FG1-10)
28	Da Vinci who talks about the sci.. practice of science of art and art of science? I've loved that phrase since my childhood. And um, in really complex systems there has to be an element of art-is-try to that. There's, which is why you might have a different outcome tomorrow from today and that's ok, um, it doesn't make either decision wrong or better necessarily but it's very hard then to put words and to put a framework around how you get there I think. I don't know what other people think (FG1-10)
29	An experience for me commonly in casework would be to sort of to remind myself to step back from all this information and sort of think what questions, what helpful, what most pertinent questions are arising, based on a set of values and then what evidence would I need in order to answer that question. I'll often start, I'll nearly always ask practitioners, people I work with, what's the question I'm looking for answer to, **(FG1-10)**

Appendix J – How should EBP in educational psychology be defined?

One of the 'focusing exercises' for the focus groups was to consider three definitions of EBP, that I chose as they featured prominently in my literature review, and discuss how they would define EBP in educational psychology.

Table 16 Definitions of EBP.

Evidence-based practice is…	**Reference**
"the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences"	American Psychological Association, [APA], 2006, p. 273
 1Satterfield et al.'s (2009) revised evidence-based practice (EBP) model.	Satterfield et al. (2009), p.382
"making decisions through the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of four sources of information: practitioner expertise and judgement, evidence from the local context, a critical evaluation of the best available research evidence, and the perspectives of people who might be affected by the decision."	Briner & Rousseau, 2011a, p.19

It is interesting to note the difference in the approach to this exercise in both groups, which highlights the facilitatory nature of the focus group moderator. In focus group one, the definitions stimuli provoked a brief response to the materials before the discussion went on to discuss the role and the nature of evidence, summed up by this excerpt, "*it can mean different things depending on what you see your role as*" (FG1-6, TEP). Whereas focus group two had a

discussion reflecting on the stimuli and drawing each other's attention to different features of the definitions.

This may have been due to the more established and equivalent level relationships between the participants in focus group two. As discussed in the ethical considerations in Section 5.2, they may have been more relaxed and felt more empowered and supported because they were in a group of friends. Shared attention was more easily achieved than in focus group one, where the dialogue and exchange of views was key.

The transdisciplinary definition by Satterfield et al. (2009) was agreeable to participants in focus group one with one participant commenting

> *until we've had this discussion I probably wouldn't have had that idea of the reflective practitioner being evidence-based, and that that counts as EBP. I would have thought it sort of journal articles and research and what people have said in the past.* (FG1-4, SEP13)

This participant also commented that the definition from the APA (2006),

> *strikes me as being very American and I would think that the school psychologist in the States, I imagine, I don't know, they are very much psychometricians, they're about diagnosing, using medical models, um, and um it strikes me that it is another conception of educational psychology but perhaps not something we've adopted much in this country*. (FG1-4, SEP13)

It was put across that there is a more holistic approach to what psychology is in the UK and that

> *people do use their personal experience much more and think far more about, rather than what's wrong with this young person, it's what's going to be most helpful for this young person and it might be that we have to tell a story about the psychometrics but it's to say, to get that young person the resources or getting the teacher to be nicer to that younger person, or something else.* (FG1-4, SEP13)

In focus group two the transdisciplinary definition by Satterfield et al. (2009) was also preferred.

> *I probably like the visual depiction of the client and environment and the Venn diagram of things interacting to get you to, so these places of interaction are going to be different for every practitioner, which is quite nice.* (FG2-19, EP3)

The participants in focus group two tried to ascertain how the Satterfield et al. (2009) model was different to the APA definition (2006) and concluded that the "context is client not the environment, so this kind of includes the environment, which is quite nice, because the client is also in this one" (FG2-19, EP3).

The term 'patient' was a problem for the participants as "*it's really medical*" (FG2-18, EP3). The same was felt for 'expertise', "I would replace that with experience because I think our day to day experience is a form of expertise" (FG2-20, TEP). The word client was deemed marginally better than patient, "*Client! That's the word I was thinking of, and I don't really like either*," (FG2-18, EP3). The APA definition was thought to ignore the individual differences between practitioners:

> *And I also don't like about the APA one is they put it in the context of the patient's characteristics, culture and preferences but actually that should also include the practitioner's, I would say, characteristics, culture and preferences because we've got all different, we'd all be bringing something* (FG2-19, EP3)

The definition by Briner and Rousseau (2011a) was appreciated for its inclusion of the local context.

> *I quite like the local context in this one…I don't think you necessarily think about it because it's just part of our understanding of the local, and I think I noticed that when I was speaking to my new year one trainee and explaining kind of bits and she was really surprised when I said that there was lots of poverty, lots of domestic violence and she was kind of shocked and I suppose it's just so, having worked here now for nearly six years, it's so kind of part of our everyday like knowledge of it* (FG2-18, EP3)

Briner and Rousseau's addition of the term critical evaluation was considered important as the best available research must be appraised. "*I like the use of the word critical, evaluation, of the best available research so I think that's something we are really good at*" (FG2-19, EP3). The term best available research was considered problematic, "*Yeah so are we accessing the best available research or are we or are we accessing what we can and how*" (FG2-20, TEP). A critical approach to research is something that participants felt confident about but this approach may be hindered by limited access to what may be the best research available.

The discussion around the different current definitions of EBP shows that in educational psychology there are different considerations in terms of evidence quality in decision making and action. Therefore, the following may be a more suitable definition in educational psychology:

Evidence-based practice in educational psychology (EBPEP) is the integration of the critically appraised relevant research with reflexive practice, considered conjointly with both practitioner and client characteristics, culture, and preferences in an ecosystemic context.

What is presented above has not been borne out of the framework analysis and is a presentation of the views of the participants related to focus group question 3, presented in Table 10. I felt it was important to separate out the answer to the question: "How would you define EBP in Educational Psychology?" as it relates to a specific output in terms of answering the research question: "How are the ways in which EPs make decisions in practice influenced by EBP?". The output being a proposed definition for EBP specific to the field of educational psychology. The small group size and limited occurrence of discussion means that what is presented is not generalisable to EPs in other contexts but it does illuminate perceptions of evidence-based decision making in educational psychology that may be useful for future research.

Appendix K – Phase 2 Additional Discussion

5.5.2 Outputs and outcomes

Contributing to the evidence base was an important conception of EBP, which could be linked to the fact that all bar one of the participants undertook doctoral training in educational psychology (Table 9). The proposed benefits of moving to this training model were in developing the skills and practices of trainees to be consumers and producers of research (Frederickson, 2002). While the majority of participants did not feel compelled to produce research, there was a notion that they were all critical consumers of research, which was accredited to the training they had undertaken. A difference in attitudes towards research consumption and production could be linked to the ethos of the particular training course as in the interchange of focus group two this observation of their different attitudes was made by the participants.

This finding extends and supports the research carried out by Burnham (2013), which suggested the utility or social value of educational psychology professional practice was deemed more important than its congruence with a recognised evidence base. However, in this study, the value of the contribution of peer-reviewed research to inform practice was recognised, although there was a viewpoint that research might be more valuable to a novice EP.

PBE was seen as part of the knowledge that an EP acquires during their practice, where they can ‘know’ something works and also as data that can be used to demonstrate accountability. As a theme ‘PBE’ supports the notion put forward by Fox (2011) that EPs should turn their experience into professional expertise, reflected in the concepts of ‘aspiration’, ‘own knowledge’ and ‘confidence’. EBP was associated more with the formalising of PBE into research outputs. There are different levels of PBE and EBP, with different expectations depending on who is asking for the evidence and what it is for. Evidence can be for the self and improving own practice, where EPs felt like they ‘know’ something works or for the service, which may have a focus on justifying practice or developing educational psychology support packages for purchase. At local and national levels, it may be more about sharing good practice at conferences and publishing action research in peer-reviewed journal articles. The role of the EP can encompass all of these levels and while EPs

may be uncomfortable in being an ‘expert’ in their interactions, a level of expert knowledge can be conveyed in publications.

The priority of developing research skills in the training may be misconceived from its original intention. The findings suggest that for some, developing research skills is a way of contributing to the profession and for others, it was a necessity to become an EP. The latter was felt to be true when research skills were not then used in the job or perceived not to be valued by their local authority as demonstrated by the lack of access to research journals. The expectation of becoming applied researchers beyond the doctorate was not felt by most participants. The expectation of carrying out applied research will undoubtedly be related to the priorities of services in which they worked and services’ links with universities. Differences in this perception are to be expected in a wider sample.